

## Returning Favors

by Midii Une

Category: Gundam Wing/AC

Genre: Romance

Language: English

Characters: Duo M., Quatre W.

Status: Completed

Published: 2000-04-26 08:00:00

Updated: 2001-01-29 08:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 15:28:22

Rating: M

Chapters: 9

Words: 30,258

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: Sequel to Studying Duo: Linnea and Duo eventually reunite but is the damage already done?

### 1. Returning Favors, Chap. 1-3

#### Returning Favors (A Sequel to Studying Duo)

by YamchaOtaku

Author's Note: This story is a sequel to my first Gundam story "Studying Duo." It is recommended you read that first but I tried to put in some flashbacks so this story can stand alone. This one is rated R because it has more violence, more bad language, use of drugs and more lemony freshness. It's really not all that bad, but let's just say you've been cautioned. As always, reviews are appreciated -- makes sad puppy eyes at readers.

#### PROLOGUE

His hands ran over her hips and he wondered if anything could feel as soft as threadbare denim. She brushed her pale blonde hair back from her face with one slender hand and she smiled at him. "You came back," she said. "I couldn't stay away," he answered. Duo pulled Linnea up against him and kissed her slowly as he slipped his hand up under her tank top and decided that her skin was definitely softer than worn-out denim. She sighed and snuggled against him. "I love you," she whispered. "But isn't there something else you're supposed to be doing right now. What about those repairs?" Linnea shoved hard against his chest with both hands and he hit the floor . . .

"DAMMIT!" Duo said, sitting up from the floor and rubbing his head. "Another dream, only a dream." He groaned and pounded on the floor with his fist in frustration.

A boom made the hangar building tremble and the familiar sound of a Gundam taking off echoed through the walls. Duo raced out the open door and watched as Gundam Wing disappeared into a brilliant blue sky studded with white clouds. That guy had somehow repaired his Gundam without parts. He had to give him credit, Heero Yuy was one incredible pilot. Almost as good a pilot as Duo was himself. He went back into the hangar to be met by shocked faces. "That guy stole parts from DeathScythe," one of the technicians informed him. "That traitor, and I complimented him!!" Duo shouted in irritation.

He inspected the damage. "Do we have any of the original plans down here," he asked. A technician handed him a sheaf of computer printouts. The damage wasn't too bad but they would have to wait for new parts. Damn Heero, he thought. Then something at the very bottom of the printout jumped off the page at him. A reference code in tiny print at the very bottom of the page: LLGMS02L2AC195. He touched the tiny print. Linnea Lang, Gundam Mobile Suit 02, Colony L2, After Colony 195. Duo stepped outside the hangar again and looked into the sky. He tried not to think of her too much but sometimes she just bubbled up inside of him and so many little things reminded him of her. What would she think of Heero, he wondered. She'd either think he was wonderful for "being creative" or want to kill him for daring to vandalize DeathScythe. If only she were here, to help fix the DeathScythe as well as for other things. He let his mind travel back to last night's dream.

## CHAPTER ONE

Linnea hunched over her computer keyboard uploading upgrades, schematics and other data to some unknown location. She sighed and reached her arms over her head and stretched to get the kinks out, she peered at her wristwatch and rubbed her eyes. "Three a.m. I've got to get some sleep," she said out loud, then she laughed. Since the launching of Operation Meteor she had become an insomniac, living on coffee and naps during class on the days she actually still went to school. "I'm talking to myself and I'm slap happy," she said out loud again, her voice echoing in the nearly empty, cavernous hangar building on Colony L2. She closed out her program and as usual before shutting down the computer Linnea clicked on the DeathScythe prototype file.

Her violet eyes, ringed by dark shadows of exhaustion, studied the mobile suit schematics although she could see them perfectly in her mind and could have rebuilt the mobile suit in its entirety without the plans if she had to. Then, finally, she clicked on the last entry in the voice notes file. Her own voice spoke to her out of the computer -- pilot gaining mastery over systems -- pilot increasing dexterity with weaponry systems -- note to self: drill pilot on emergency repair techniques and then Duo's voice faintly in the background -- let me see that headset--. Then his voice came in clearly-- testing, testing (laughter)-- note to computer: pilot adores technician -- note to self: show her how much-- systems check: cockpit hatch closing, A-okay. The sound of static. Linnea continued to stare at the screen a moment after the program ended. "Duo," she whispered to herself, closing her eyes.

Tears of self-pity started forming, she was so tired and so alone and it would feel so good to cry right now. But the tears wouldn't fall. "Arghh!" she said. "Snap out of it and quit being so sappy. It really isn't you." LLGMS02L2AC195 she typed, then signed off. She hastily

clicked off the machine and rose from the chair. Shower and sleep, she thought, running a hand through her hair. You should try to get back to some type of normal life, she told herself for the thousandth time. But pouring herself into her work was the only way she knew to cope with the stress of not knowing a damned thing about what was going on with the operation on Earth.

An unfamiliar sound echoed in the hangar and suddenly a bright light shone in her face, blinding her in the darkened room. "What-who," she wondered stupidly, shocked by the suddenness of it all. "Linnea Lang?" a disembodied voice spoke. "In the name of OZ you are ordered to immediately travel to Earth and provide the information you have on Gundam mobile suit design." Before she could protest two soldiers grabbed each of her arms and started dragging her out. "Copy all files from this system immediately," the disembodied voice ordered. "NOOO," Linnea shouted, adrenaline pouring through her. She twisted one arm free and slammed her wrist against the wall, setting off a detonation button on her watch.

The hangar lit up with the explosion and two OZ soldiers attempting to start up the computer were incinerated in the blast. Linnea wrestled her other arm away from the shocked soldier who held her as the building started to blaze in the aftermath of the explosion. "Damn, I wasn't close enough to go with it," Linnea thought regretfully as she ran out into the night and smack into another group of OZ soldiers waiting outside the hangar. "Stop her or we're in deep trouble with Engineer Tsuborov. She already destroyed the computer files and took two men out," a voice shouted from behind her. One of the soldiers panicked and slammed the butt of his rifle into the side of her head and everything went dark.

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Darkness and pain. "Did I die and go to hell," Linnea thought as her head throbbed in agony. She could feel sticky blood drying on the side of her face and tried to reach up to rub it away but she couldn't move her hands. "Sleep deprivation, slow reflexes. You let OZ capture you, you fool," she berated herself angrily. She forced her eyes open. She was on a space shuttle apparently and they had shackled her hands behind the seat. She struggled a little, but the way she was feeling she wasn't going to be busting out of any metal handcuffs anytime in the near future.

"Awake already?" a voice questioned her. "Tough little thing, aren't you? Caused us a lot of trouble blowing up those files!" the unit commander said and slapped her sharply across the face. She blinked back startled tears of pain. "We had orders to treat you carefully but you've proven to be dangerous. Did you know you killed two of my men?" Linnea glared at the commander. As if she was supposed to care. "Only two, that's a shame," she said. The commander clenched his fists, then composed himself. "Engineer Tsuborov will decide how to handle you from here. My mission is completed. Now it's time for you to take a little nap, it's a long way back to Earth." He jabbed a needle in her arm roughly and she grimaced.

My first trip into outer space and I'm going to sleep through it, she thought with regret. Linnea had spent all her life on L2 colony, her father trying to hide her technological genius from OZ and the EarthSphere Alliance. Often she had detested the necessity of subterfuge that kept her from traveling and meeting other scientists.

Be careful what you wish for, she thought grimly. She stared out the window at the fathomless blackness and the myriad sparkling stars, planets and colonies. She thought how beautiful and peaceful it all was before she passed out.

## CHAPTER TWO

Linnea choked as someone tried to pour water down her throat. She coughed and was surprised when she was able to reach up with her hand to cover her mouth. A bizarre man dressed in distinctive Tudor style clothing was watching her closely as a nurse wiped her head with a wet cloth. She tried to pull herself up to a sitting position, as the man started to speak. "Miss Lang," he said. "I am Chief Engineer Tsuborov of the OZ military. I can't tell you how deeply I regret the appalling treatment you received. I gave strict orders that you were to be treated as an honored guest." Linnea merely looked down at her raw, bruised wrists and decided not to speak, she really didn't want to spend another week hanging from a wall in a prison cell, she decided, not just yet anyway. "I firmly believe that you will come to realize that OZ is the future of Earth and Space and that it will be of no use for you to resist joining us. We need brilliant young people like you. I promise that if you join us you will be the shining star of universal technology. Think about it Miss Lang. Anything at all that you require will be yours. Don't tell me you haven't wondered what we've been working on. Everything will be at your fingertips. You're beautiful, young and brilliant Miss Lang. You have everything to look forward too." "All I want is peace and freedom for the colonies," she said, looking at him directly. "You're behind the times Miss Lang," Tsuborov said, slightly irritated. "Even the colonies themselves don't want that anymore. They will soon realize that cooperating with OZ is the right decision, and you will make the same realization. OZ can be very persuasive." Linnea merely shut her eyes and slid back down in the bed, curling her arms around a pillow. She felt too weak to argue or protest right now. "Get some rest," Tsuborov said in an approving voice. The girl had spirit and she would be an incalculable asset to OZ once she'd been shown the error of her previous beliefs. And he had been the one to discover her. The top men at Romefeller were pleased and anxious to meet the girl. "There'll be a reception tomorrow night here at OZ headquarters so we can show you just who we really are and how happy we are that you'll soon be a part of our organization. Try to recover quickly, I can't put this off." He waited for her answer, but she was already sleeping again.

Tsuborov stalked out of the room and ordered the execution of the team that had brought Linnea to Earth, they had certainly botched the job, treating his treasured discovery so roughly.

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Two maids fussed over Linnea, ooohing and aaaahing over her appearance. She looked dully into the full-length mirror hardly believing that she was that girl. Her pale blonde hair was curled and styled like a Greek goddess: braided up in the back with ringlets on the side and a headband made of amethysts. The dress was also reminiscent of ancient Greece, made out of layers of transparent lavender material. The girl in the mirror was a stranger. She looked ethereal and delicate enough to blow away on a strong wind. Well, Linnea, thought, sleep deprivation and not eating right will do that to you. Not to mention being kidnapped and beaten and drugged. And

now OZ wanted to throw her a welcome party. The organization was truly insane.

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She truly looked like Athena, the goddess of wisdom, the brilliant and beautiful Miss Lang. Tsuborov had gone over some simple mobile suit schematics with her that morning and without even trying she had dazzled him by pointing out numerous flaws in the designs, and he could tell she was holding back. But soon enough she would be willing to take the project on. She would be tempted into it by her own genius. She was addicted to technology, it was like a drug to her, he could tell. And sooner or later she would have to do something about it. He pulled her around the room of Romefeller dignitaries like a prize, showing her off to everyone, before handing her over to a handsome young OZ soldier, designated as her bodyguard. Tsuborov wouldn't put it past the rebellion to try to assassinate Miss Lang in order to keep her from joining OZ. Her defection would certainly be the end of their futile attempt to stop the juggernaut.

Linnea had the same thoughts. Tonight would be the perfect chance for her allies to get her out of OZ's hands, one way or another. She was perfectly willing to die and she kept alert for anyone suspicious that might mean her way out of this nightmare of a farce. Wandering off alone would be impossible with her hand held so tightly by this idiot OZ soldier who thought he was her boyfriend or something. Well, she'd think of something, wasn't she the "brilliant and beautiful Miss Lang"?

### CHAPTER THREE

"Please dance with me Miss Lang. It would be such an honor," Officer Huit said to the girl whose hand he held. He thought how lucky he was to be her bodyguard. He had heard Engineer Tsuborov brag about how important she would be to OZ. He might get a promotion if he could make her happy. Officer Huit wondered what her problem was. Everyone he knew would be thrilled to be pursued by the Romefeller Foundation, it was an honor not to be dreamed of. Well, she had probably been brainwashed by the evil rebellion, poor little thing. Huit squeezed her hand tighter as she finally agreed to dance with him. He'd show her that OZ was a wonderful organization and he started talking about his loyalty to the cause.

Linnea stood in the ballroom at the Romefeller Foundation headquarters trying desperately to ignore the inane chatter of Officer Huit. If something didn't happen soon she thought she would go crazy. Either this fool's babble would make her head explode or she would become so tempted to work on a mobile suit that she would beg Tsuburov to let her upgrade OZ's mobile dolls. She could tell he knew how she felt, that bastard. She had barely been able to contain herself when she toured the factory and saw all the obvious errors they were making in the design. The biggest mistake of course being the lack of a human pilot. Linnea believed deeply that the pilot was the most important part of the mobile suit and if she could have she would have customized one for every soldier that wanted to fight for the rebellion. But of course that was too gigantic of an undertaking even for her, she admitted.

Suddenly the air was filled with sirens and the room was filled with panic. "It's a Gundam attack," someone shouted. Huit, whose only

purpose in life at that moment was to keep the young technological genius safe, snapped to alert. Linnea, however, saw only her chance to escape. She let someone in the panicking crowd push her over and when he helped her up she slipped her hand inside his coat and grabbed his ornate, gilt-encrusted pistol. In the noise and chaos, no one noticed or heard when she pulled the trigger and shot her bodyguard point blank.

Cursing the idiotic, neo-Greek dress they had made her wear she hiked the skirt up over her knees, clutched the pistol, and ran like hell toward the OZ mobile suit armory. The place was in as much of an uproar as the ballroom and no one saw the girl in the lavender dress clamber up into one of the Taurus suits in a very unladylike manner. They noticed however when the suit started up, but Linnea took care of that by blasting out half the building and a good number of the idle mobile suits. "Now, it's payback time," she whispered, wishing she had Duo's skill at the controls, but also knowing she would've made a damn good mobile suit pilot herself. Even if she didn't get out of there she'd take more than a few of the enemy with her. She quickly acclimated herself to the Taurus cockpit and took off into the heart of the battle.

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The Gundam pilot was faced with tough odds as the majority of OZ main force swept around him from all angles. He might not make it out but at least he'd accomplish his mission of decimating a devastating percentage of the enemy arsenal. The pilot noticed a large explosion from the main arsenal building and wondered what could have happened to help him accomplish his objective without his having to go deeper into enemy territory. He returned his attention to the battle at hand and tightened his hands on the controls as he saw an enemy blast headed right for him. "Sandrock, you can withstand this. I know you can do it," he whispered, as if in encouragement, to his Gundam.

He unconsciously closed his eyes before the impact and was surprised when a full 30 seconds had passed and nothing had hit him. He blinked as he noticed a Taurus mobile suit careen past and turn a graceful spiral in the sky while blasting away at the OZ troops. Blasting away at the OZ troops? What was happening? Did this mean he had an ally or was it a trick? He spoke to the pilot of the Taurus but got no answer. Well there was no time to investigate this strange turn of events further. Between Quatre and the mysterious Taurus the OZ suits were soon smoldering masses of molten metal. As soon as Quatre decided he was definitely going to make it out of there successfully he noticed the Taurus leave the battle field. "I've got to find out who that is and why they wouldn't answer me," he muttered to himself deciding to follow his mysterious ally.

Linnea breathed hard and navigated the Taurus away from OZ headquarters. She was shaking in exhaustion, her adrenaline rush was fading fast and she didn't have a clue what to do next. She thought about the battle, it had been a great satisfaction to finally pilot a mobile suit against the enemy. She managed a weary grin, she hadn't done badly at all. She considered the Gundam she had seen. It was similar to the DeathScythe, really not a bad piece of work. She'd like to meet whoever crafted it but now was not the time to make new acquaintances. She had to find a safe place to hide out before Romefeller figured out she was among the missing. There was actually only one real option she could think of to be absolutely sure she

didn't re-captured. She started looking for a self-detonator, but it didn't seem like these models had them, after all there wasn't any secret about the Tauruses. She looked below her and saw mountains. Option Two, she thought, crash and burn. Better to take rebellion secrets to the grave than to be faced with the persuasiveness of OZ. She thought briefly of Duo. He would probably never find out what had happened to her, which was just as well. She shook off the thought, now was no time for sentiment, and she rammed the controls forward, closed her eyes tightly and headed toward the ground at sickening speed.

Quatre gasped as he saw the explosion ahead of him. That suit had just taken a nosedive and crashed into the mountains. What was the pilot trying to accomplish? He landed the Sandrock and hopped out of the cockpit. Quatre scanned the area and saw nothing but the glowing remains of the Taurus mobile suit. His sky-blue eyes brightened with unshed tears, whoever it was had helped him, maybe even saved him. Why had they done this? He turned to leave when he spotted a small, crumpled form thrown clear of the wreckage. His first thought was that she looked like an angel that had fallen from the sky. Carefully he let his fingers rest on her neck to try and feel a pulse. It was unbelievably still there. "You'll be alright, I promise," he said to the unconscious girl. "I have to find out who you are and why you helped me."

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A concussion, exhaustion and shock, the doctor said. If only that was all, Quatre thought. He frowned at the bruises on her wrists and the obvious needle marks on her arms. He wasn't usually a vengeful person but he hoped that whoever had hurt her had been killed in the attack. More than ever he believed she had to be a member of the rebellion force. "We need a secret password or handshake to identify each other," he thought, remembering his first meeting with Trowa.

"Master Quatre," Rashid called to him, lowering his head respectfully. "I don't like to question your decisions but we can't have a woman here at the base. I'm afraid she must be a spy and besides our culture does not allow women to be involved in the waging of war. Send her to some hospital far away and forget about that battle. It was probably a trick. I do not like this."

Quatre merely shook his head and returned to the girl's bedside. He wished Trowa were here to discuss the obvious merits of what Rashid said. But he believed in his heart that she wasn't a spy, that she had really meant to help him that night. He had to know who she was and why she had purposely crashed that mobile suit.

TO BE CONTINUED . . .

## 2. Returning Favors, Chapter 4

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Finally a nice long chapter update! If you need a laugh go check out The (kinda) Great Romance Debate for some teasers on upcoming chapters and a look behind the scenes of this fanfic. As always readers and reviewers are most appreciated.

RETURNING FAVORS by YamchaOtaku

CHAPTER FOUR Linnea awoke slowly to a view of four gray metal walls. She closed her eyes quickly again. Where was she? From the way she felt she had obviously survived her own kamikaze tactics. Why am I such a failure at this, she thought to herself, while another part of her was grateful to still be alive. She'd have very little to be grateful for if she was back at OZ headquarters though. They'd be very unlikely to underestimate her ability to escape again. She clenched her fist in irritation.

"You're awake!" a soft voice said. "I'm so happy. I was starting to worry you'd never wake up. It's been five days since your, since you-, since the accident." The voice was familiar, she had heard it before. It was the pilot, the Gundam pilot that had attacked OZ headquarters. Her violet eyes blinked open and she studied him. He wasn't her idea of a pilot at all. Could it really have been this boy she had seen obliterating the OZ mobile suits with a determination that almost matched Duo's? He looked like a schoolboy, sweet and shy and about as different from Duo as vanilla ice cream was to chocolate.

She grimaced as she tried to sit up. "Be careful," the pilot said instantly helping her out, "you were pretty badly hurt. But the doctor says you'll be all right if you take it easy."

"I'm Quatre," he introduced himself politely, taking her hand. She tried to shake hands but it didn't seem like her body was taking orders from her brain just yet. "Sorry about that," she apologized, drawing her hand away. "You're the Gundam pilot, aren't you?" "So you did hear me that night," he said. "I have so many questions. Who are you? Why did you help me? And why did you crash that mobile suit? You could have been killed."

"I'm Linnea L-, well, just Linnea," she answered. "I helped you because you were fighting OZ." She ignored the last question, it was a touchy subject.

"Then you're not an OZ soldier," he asked.

"Definitely not! I'm from the colonies," she answered. "My father and I worked with a group that wants to stop OZ and the EarthSphere Alliance from influencing what goes on in space. They found out about that somehow. . . I think my father must be dead."

"I'm sorry," Quatre said. "We must be on the same side. I'm from the colonies too and I've met someone else, another pilot and there must be others. I don't know why we're not all working together. Why did you crash that suit, it seemed like you were handling it pretty well up until then?"

She looked down at the blanket and picked off some invisible lint. "It seemed like a permanent way to escape from OZ," she whispered. He waited till she looked up again. "I would have helped you," he said. "You have helped me," Linnea said. "And I haven't even thanked you yet. You must think I'm an ungrateful jerk. It's just that I'm not thinking straight."

After Quatre left, Linnea remembered that he had mentioned meeting another Gundam pilot. Had it been Duo? She would have to find out. If it wasn't that meant there were at least three pilots here on Earth.



She wondered why there were so many secrets. Someone had been directing the project, but all those details had been kept in the dark, at least from her. Quatre was right that they should all work together. She trusted him already. She stayed awake for a long time, staring at the ceiling and wondering what exactly was going on and what in the world she was going to do with herself now that she was on Earth.

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Her fingers touched the yellowed ivory piano keys softly. She smiled a little to herself. Until the Maganac leader decided to trust her, which she supposed would happen on the first of never, this was as close to a computer keyboard as she would get. It had been a long time since her childhood music lessons, lessons she had wanted to evade in order to get back to working with the technicians in the hangar. Still, playing the piano was a good way to let out your emotions without totally giving yourself away. After all it was just a song. Notes of a song she had seen in a history book popped into her head, she hummed softly to herself and began to slowly pick out the old-fashioned tune.

The harsh desert sunlight filled the room, softened somewhat by the sheer white curtains at the tall windows. Quatre was drawn by the music, he knew better than anyone how music could give you a peek into someone's soul. He had been so surprised when Trowa Barton had played with him. Trowa wouldn't talk about himself, but Quatre had felt like he knew him after that. It had been their unspoken promise to back each other up in future battles.

He knew Linnea wasn't playing for his benefit or to make him any unspoken promises. Quatre had never heard the song before, but it was obviously old, just a sweet, sad little song, but so beautiful the way she played it.

She stopped playing and jumped up from the bench as he came into the room. "I didn't mean to interrupt," he apologized. "What was that song?" "Something I saw in a book on the Napoleonic Wars," she explained. "Have you ever studied history Quatre? I don't know if it makes me feel better or worse to know that conflicts like this have always been a part of human life. Times of peace are just little pauses in the music of war here on Earth. And now, those of us who weren't even born here, those who were born in space are caught up in the constant repetition of conflict. If only there was a way to break the pattern."

"We can make a difference, especially if we all start working together," Quatre said, sitting down on the piano bench beside her.

"If I could just get my hands on a computer I'm sure I could uncover some more information about what we're doing here," Linnea said, frustration apparent in her voice. "I'm just about going crazy with nothing to do. I've never gone this long without working on my designs. Oh Quatre, please, please take me to see your Gundam. I know you took hits, I was there, if I just look I could give the technicians ideas to make it better. It is your mobile suit after all, it doesn't belong to them you know. I won't touch anything if they don't want me too, well, I'll try not to. Please?"

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Rasid groaned. What was Master Quatre thinking? First he had brought the other Gundam pilot here and now this strange girl. As soon as she had entered the hangar she had acted like she was in charge and started giving all of them orders and strangely enough the orders had made sense. She held out her china coffee cup and he refilled it without her even asking, she took a sip and reviewed the organized chaos taking place inside the hangar.

Linnea was back in her element and for the first time in weeks she felt like herself. She felt like a child at Christmas with a new Gundam to tinker with. Now to get Quatre into that cockpit and see what he was made of. Then she'd hack into the main computer and find out exactly who was in charge of this operation and what the hell they were thinking keeping them all in the dark like puppets until they were needed.

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Quatre watched closely as Linnea typed an old reference code into the search system of his base's computer: LLGMS02L2AC193. The system ground away for a few seconds before lists of data matching the code appeared on the screen. "There you have it," she said, touching a finger to the screen in triumph. "We are all connected. I'll just send in a message from here and see how the guys in charge react." She typed rapidly: LLGMS04PEAC195. "Okay," she said, "let's see how they like these updates on Sandrock from Planet Earth. I wonder if they'll be happy to see me. By the way, where's Rasid? I need more coffee?"

"So," Quatre said. "You're from the L2 cluster and you worked on the designs for Gundam 02. That is what that means isn't it?" Linnea nodded. "Did you know the pilot? Do you know where he is now," Quatre asked. For the first time in the intense 12 hours they had spent in the hangar the exhilarated look left her face. She put her head down on the desk and struggled not to get overwhelmed by emotions. "No," she whispered. "I have no idea where he is."

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Doktor S studied the Sandrock design updates in disbelief and checked the reference code at the bottom again. LLGMS04PEAC195. It was true, the missing 02 technician was alive and on Earth and she was starting to figure things out. He had to contact Professor G immediately.

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Linnea stared at the computer screen waiting for the reaction to her blatant message. I know what's going on, she thought, come on, talk to me. She glanced over at Quatre who was sleeping with his head down on the desk. Except for them the hangar was deserted. Being nearly alone like this made her nervous now as it never had before the incident with OZ. She shivered a little as she looked around the dark hangar building and wished she had one of those really big knives the Maganacs all carried around.

All at once the screen lit up and a raspy voice called her attention, "Lang's daughter, isn't it?" the voice asked. She blinked at the

screen which held the image of one of the strangest looking people she had ever seen. "Who the hell are you?" she gasped. The hint of a smile touched the Professor's face, then disappeared again. "You can call me Professor G," he said. "What I want to know is what you're doing there with 04? We assumed you were dead along with your father in the explosion of the L2 hangar. Was it OZ?" She nodded, so her father was dead, well they hadn't been close, but still, she squeezed her eyes shut tightly for a moment.

"My turn to ask the questions now," she said. "Where's 02 and how quick can I get there?"

"02 is in North America at the moment and there's mission imminent," Professor G said. "But you're not to go there. Is that understood?"

"Why not? That's my Gundam, they need me there," Linnea protested.

"We already have a technician out there. You're in the most secure spot we have on Earth there with 04. We want you to stay there. Don't leave under any circumstances. Is that understood Lang?" G ordered.

"I worked for my father, I never agreed to take orders from you," Linnea said. She wanted to go to North America, she wanted to be with Duo. Quatre was wonderful, the facility was wonderful, there were a lot of things she could do to upgrade Sandrock and you couldn't argue with the service or the coffee. But she wanted to be with Duo . . .

"If you want to remain a part of this operation, you'll take orders and ask no more questions," Professor G continued. "You should know we're starting development of two new mobile suits and complete upgrades of the existing five. You'd be in on every aspect of those projects of course. Doktor S was thrilled with your work on Sandrock, to be honest I'll be sorry to lose your input on DeathScythe. Feel free to keep up on that project as well as 04."

Linnea narrowed her eyes and considered. "Alright," she sighed. "You've hooked me. I'm in and I'll stay put for now. But tell me--"

"I knew we could count on you Lang. It's good to have you back. We'll be in touch," G signed out.

TO BE CONTINUED . . .

### 3. Returning Favors, Chapter 5

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Here's the part where I reduce myself to begging for reviews. Please review this story ^\_~ please, please, please! Is anybody still out there? Don't just hit me, let me know what you think! Author stands on corner holding sign "will write more chapters for reviews!" Cast of characters cover their collective faces in embarrassment --`

RETURNING FAVORS

By YamchaOtaku

## CHAPTER FIVE

Linnea heard the sound of the heavy trucks but it was a common sound here in the desert. They were always parts deliveries, never Quatre returning from the horrible failure of a mission. She sighed and ripped more wiring out of the unfortunate Maganac mobile suit that she was currently taking out her frustrations on. With Quatre and the Sandrock gone there was nothing else to do, so why not work on improving these Leos. Once she finished one the Maganacs could use the design to upgrade all the others. She pushed strands of hair out of her face leaving a dirty streak across her cheek.

Rasid looked at the girl, she reminded him unnervingly of Master Quatre. The same amazing shade of platinum hair and for now even the same clothes, although she didn't wear them in the same neatly-pressed manner Master Quatre did. Her pink shirt sleeves were rolled up and the ends of the shirt tied in a knot around her midriff showing more skin than he liked to see showing, he thought disapprovingly. He had to admit she worked hard and she was genuinely concerned about Master Quatre. As was he. When would the boy get back?

The Maganac leader heard shouts from outside. Now what? Then he grinned, they only shouted like that for one reason. Master Quatre had finally returned. One of the red fez-wearing Arabs burst into the hangar. "Rasid!! Miss Linnea!! Master Quatre is home!!" he shouted.

Linnea closed her eyes in vast relief and expertly descended from the Leo cockpit via a cable, a much better method than a ladder she thought momentarily. She dashed out of the hangar into the glaring desert sun. "Quatre," she shouted, running through the crowd. She gave him a little shake. "My God Quatre, where have you been? We were all frantic! Especially Rasid."

Quatre sighed. It was always good to return here, the only place on Earth, and he admitted in the universe, where he felt at home. He looked so gloomy she just had to hug him and he whispered in her ear, "Did you hear what happened. We shot down the Alliance leaders, it was a mistake." "I know, I know," she said, trying to be comforting and patting his back soothingly. "It will work out somehow, it has too. Let's go inside and you can tell me everything." She took his hand and squeezed it.

A shadow fell on them and a familiar voice said, "Hey Quatre, you didn't tell me you had a twin sister." Her heart started thumping crazily. It just couldn't be. She turned around to look at Duo standing there with the sun backlighting his chocolate-brown hair and adding gold highlights to it, giving him an almost unreal quality. She couldn't even talk, she just stared, blinking her eyes in disbelief and dawning happiness. Duo's face mirrored Linnea's. That girl looked just like Linnea, she WAS Linnea. But how? Who the hell cared? She was here and it had better not be another dream. She jumped on him then and they held each other and hopped up and down like a couple of little kids who hadn't seen their best friend in a month. "Oh Linnea. . . baby!" he said swinging her around in his arms. She wrapped her arms around his neck and started planting loud kisses all over his salty-sweaty face. "mmm, I missed you. . .mmm, I

thought I'd never see you again. . .mmm, what are you doing here?" He loosened her clinging arms from around his neck and took a deep breath. "Don't strangle me in the first five minutes," he teased, then pulled her back into his arms and held her so tightly she almost lost her breath.

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Duo sighed and snuggled his head more comfortably in Linnea's lap as they sat around a tiny campfire out on the desert with Quatre. He looked up into the velvety night sky and searched the stars for L2 colony before realizing again that she was really here with him, on Earth, not up there somewhere. She had been in big trouble and he hadn't known a thing about it and Duo was feeling a little stressed even though the danger was long past. There sure were pitfalls to caring about someone in addition to yourself. He was the one that was supposed to be putting his life on the line. But not Linnea. He glanced at Quatre poking at the fire. He owed him big time for saving his girl. What a rotten week it had been, the whole mission was compromised since Heero had shot down that shuttle-load of Alliance dignitaries. He resolutely tried to put the fiasco out of his mind and enjoy the moment. The air in the desert was cool at night and it played with the loose strands of hair that fell from the sloppy bun she wore. She was smiling down at him as sweet as candy and she tickled his cheek with the end of his braid before bending down to kiss him for about the thousandth time that day.

"I could get used to you being this nice all the time," Duo said, cracking a joke to take his mind away from his problems. "Ha," Linnea said. "Don't get used to it. We have a lot of work to do tomorrow. But first I want to talk about what happened on that mission. I'm tired of being left out and not knowing what's going on. How did it happen?"

Quatre tried to explain it. "Somehow the OZ commander, Treize Khushrenada, decoyed us by putting the Alliance leaders into the OZ shuttle. Poor Heero didn't know what he was doing. How are the colonies going to see us now, after what we've done?"

"Treize Khushrenada," Linnea said thoughtfully, lingering over the name. "What a simple plan, but totally devastating."

"Huh," Duo said, sitting up. "You almost sound like you admire that guy. Everything we've worked for is going down the tubes because of him. Why Wufei didn't kill him and be done with it I'll never know. Well, never send a boy to do the God of Death's job!"

"Well, you have to admit it was a good plan. I can't help being impressed, enemy or not," Linnea said, popping a frozen grape into Duo's open mouth. "Tell me what you've been up to all this time. Maybe I'll be impressed with you too," she teased him.

He glared at her in mock anger, then grinned as he thought of just the right story. "Weeeelllllll," he drawled. "I did save this beautiful girl from being shot." Linnea raised an eyebrow at him and muttered, "beautiful, hmmp." "What?" Duo said innocently, "I may be taken but I'm not blind. She was kind of strange anyway. It was Heero who was trying to shoot her, that guy is something else. She saw his Gundam or something and he was all uptight about it and wanted to kill her. So me, being the gentleman I am, stepped in and saved her. But does

she thank me? NO! She tries to protect Heero and acts like I'm the bad guy. Go figure. It was like they had some strange connection. If you ever meet Heero you'll know what I mean. It's like he's not totally human."

Quatre sighed. "I wish Trowa, Heero and Wufei were here now. We're going to need to face this problem together. At least from this mission we all know the other pilots now."

"Well, at least you brought Duo home with you," Linnea said, beaming at Quatre. "Thank you so much." She leaned over and pressed a soft, grateful kiss on his cheek. I would do anything for you, Quatre thought to himself, glad that he had finally made at least two people happy.

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Duo rolled his eyes as several Maganacs eyed him suspiciously as he walked the halls of Quatre's house in the middle of the night. He had to find Linnea, she still hadn't told him what had happened to her. Plus he wanted to spend as much time as possible with her before he got called away again and that could happen at any moment.

Linnea was sound asleep for the first time in weeks, for once she was sure that Duo was safe. Duo looked down at her. How could she be sleeping? She should have known he would sneak up to see her. Oh well, he was pretty tired himself, he'd just hop under the covers and . . . OWWWWWWW!

"Are you trying to kill me? What's wrong with you," Duo yelled turning on a light and gripping his bleeding hand. Linnea was sitting up in bed pointing a huge, sharp knife at him and looking about ready to scream bloody murder. "Whoa," he said. "Do not scream, Quatre's fez posse will come in here and kill me. It's me, Duo." Her large frightened eyes stared at him a moment before registering who it was and finally she whispered, "you scared me" in a soft little voice he could barely hear.

"Oookay," Duo said, trying to pry the knife out of her death grip and finally succeeding. "Calm down. Why are you so afraid? Nothing can get you with those guys out there and Shinigami in here. Okay?" He wrapped his hand up in a piece of the sheet and pulled her into his arms. She was shaking and her heart was pounding so hard he could feel it thumping against his chest. What had happened to her, to make her act like this? Quatre had only told him the barest details of what little he knew himself and now was obviously not the time to make her talk about it.

"How come I never get the good missions?" he joked softly, trying to snap her out of it. "I should have been the one to save you and then they would have known better than to mess with the God of Death's girl." She smiled weakly and protested, "Quatre didn't save me. I escaped myself, he just caused a really big distraction."

"Yeah, I know," Duo agreed, not wanting to argue with her. "I hear you're quite the little mobile suit pilot. That's my girl. For a minute there when you stuck me with that knife I thought Quatre had one of those guys stashed in here. Geez, they all look at me like they want to kill me or something."

She sighed and looked at his wounded hand, it wasn't too bad and had already stopped bleeding. "They didn't like me either at first," she said. "And once they do trust you they're even more scary and overprotective. Quatre told Rasid to make sure I was safe and didn't get in trouble and with them Quatre's wish is their command. I'm just like the miller's daughter in Rumpelstiltskin, she could spin straw into gold and I can make Gundams. Not a very safe occupation these days." She started to giggle suddenly.

Duo was relieved she seemed back to her old self, although the comment about the unsafe occupation made him think. She was a valuable commodity to every side. "What's so funny," he asked curiously. "It's a good thing I didn't scream," she said. "The other night one of those big, scary desert spiders got in here and I gave a good, old-fashioned girl shriek and about 10 of those guys came rushing in here ready to kill the intruder. The poor spider never had a chance." Duo gulped. "Thank God you didn't scream this time baby. I wouldn't want to have ended up like that spider. That would have been very uncool."

"Your poor hand," Linnea said, kissing his fingertips. "I'm so sorry. How can I make it up to you?" She glanced up at him flirtatiously. Duo grinned back wickedly. "Well, let's see. You. Me. A bed. Let me think a minute. . ." She shook her head sympathetically. "A bed," she said. "Now that's a stretch for us. A swivel chair or a Gundam cockpit maybe. But a bed?"

"Don't worry baby. I think I'll be able to manage," he said, leaning forward and letting the weight of his body push her back against the pillows. Linnea sighed and pulled him closer, she tugged the rubber band off the end of his braid and let it fly across the room. "Mmmm," she murmured. "I love your hair. So soft." Her fingers loosened the braid and let Duo's hair fall over both of them. "And I love your lips," he said kissing her. "And your neck," he added, nibbling at it tenderly. "I love you," he whispered. "Not as much as I love you," she answered. "We'll see," he said, turning off the light.

TO BE CONTINUED . . .

#### 4. Returning Favors, Chapter 6

Author's Note: The story starts to take its twist in this chapter. Just so you know, I've outlined 11 chapters, but it might >be 12 if they start running long like this one, so we're at about the half-way point. The rest of the characters are starting<br>to show up. I'm trying to add a little more humor due to the strange and unforeseen popularity of this series' evil twin >The (kinda) Great Romance Debate! Well, please review, I won't be uncool and beg this time. Duo sez: Yes, that was<br>very uncool!

><br>RETURNING FAVORS

><br>By YamchaOtaku

><br>CHAPTER SIX

><br>Quatre rubbed his hand over his eyes wearily and looked around the hangar. Linnea was already hard at work, tapping >away at the computer and Duo was nowhere in sight. He noticed that she was humming a little to herself and smiling.<br>She was so happy she almost glowed. "Good morning," he said. "Good morning," she said cheerfully, continuing to smile.

>"Where's Duo?" he asked. "He's still sleeping," Linnea answered.  
"Are you sure," Quatre asked. "I just knocked on his<br>door with  
some coffee but he wasn't there." She hesitated a moment. "Ummm. Yes.  
I'm sure. Positive," she answered  
>quickly, a sudden blush stained her cheekbones. "Oh?" Quatre said,  
puzzled. "Oh," he said again, understanding.<br>"Sorry, I didn't  
mean, well, umm. . ."  
><br>In an effort to change the subject, Linnea stated the obvious.  
"I've got some schematics for Sandrock here. I'm just  
>finishing up." He pulled up a chair and looked at the screen  
expectantly. "I'm glad you're an early riser like me. Duo can<br>be a  
bit lazy when it comes to sleep," Linnea said. "I missed you when you  
were gone, you know." "I missed you too,"  
>he said, thinking that it was nice to have her to himself for a  
little while, he liked Duo but he did have a tendency  
to<br>monopolize the conversation when he was present. "Thanks again  
for working on Sandrock, I know DeathScythe must  
>be your priority while Duo is here." <br>  
>"Oh Quatre," she said. "Don't say that. I work for you now. Duo has  
his own technician in North America. I can't deny<br>that DeathScythe  
is my pride and joy but that doesn't stop me from wanting to work on  
Sandrock too. Just look at these  
>changes, why, after this your fighting ability will increase nearly  
10 percent." She quickly tapped in the code GMS04, so<br>quickly that  
she missed a beat and typed in GMS00 instead. "Ack, a typo," she  
said. "Strange, there's actually something  
>coming up. That's not like me to mistype. I must not have had enough  
coffee this morning." Quatre quickly took the hint<br>and refilled  
her cup. They tapped their china cups together gently in a little  
ritual they had and turned their attention  
>back to the screen. <br>  
>Linnea whistled softly as she studied the blueprints for the mobile  
suit on the screen. Quatre just stared, eyes wide.<br>"Look at this,"  
she said reverently. "This is amazing. So powerful it almost borders  
on overkill." "That's a twin beam  
>buster rifle, isn't it," Quatre said, pointing at a section of the  
design. "Do you think someone's actually constructed this<br>thing?"  
Linnea frowned a little and tapped the keys. She shook her head.  
"There've been no updates on this in more  
>than 10 years, it's fairly safe to say the plan was abandoned. But  
why? Well, there should be no harm in pirating some<br>of these specs  
for some future projects." She started clicking and creating files.  
"It's called Zero, isn't it?" Quatre asked.  
>She nodded. <br>  
>\*\*\*\* <br>  
>"Linnea, please stop. Stop working and talk to me. Or just let me  
have one little kiss, please," Duo begged, poking his<br>head into  
the DeathScythe cockpit. "At least come out and have a cup of  
coffee."  
><br>"Go away Duo and stop trying to tempt me with coffee and your --  
um -- charms," Linnea said, not taking her eyes off  
>her work. "This is very important, just let me finish and then I'm  
all yours. Uhhh, you can be such a pest sometimes!" She<br>spared him  
a glance and sighed in exasperation as he looked at her with his  
puppy-dog eyes. "All right," she said,  
>relenting. "One, very small, very quick kiss then you will go away  
and leave me alone? I am serious." Duo nodded in<br>agreement,  
crossing his fingers behind his back.  
><br>He leaned in and she gave him a quick kiss, no more than a mere  
touch of the lips. "Give me more, or-or I'll tickle you,"



>he said pulling himself into the cockpit and grabbing hold of her. "No more," she said trying to shove him away. "Get out,<br>you promised!" "I had my fingers crossed," he said, wiggling them in front of her. "If you tickle me I'll scream so loud,">she threatened. "Just try it baby," he said, kissing her and tickling her at the same time. "Mmph, mmm, stop it, Duo,<br>mmm, STOP," she tried to say in between tickles and kisses, unable to catch her breath from laughing let alone scream.><br>Suddenly there was a sound, a sound like someone was clearing their throat right there in the cockpit with them. Duo>was so startled he banged his head hard against the roof of the cockpit and Linnea gave a little shriek and pulled the<br>ends of her blouse, which had mysteriously come undone, together. "Hard at work I see," Professor G said, speaking>from the communications screen without humor. "Well," Duo said, regaining his composure first. "You know what they<br>say. All work and no play -- owww." Linnea smacked him. Professor G explained the next mission.><br>For a few moments after the screen went blank they just sat there letting the information sink in. "Whoa, just wait a>minute Linnea," Duo said, pulling her back down. "Don't run away from me." He took her face in his hands and forced her<br>to look at him. "I love you. I really, really do and I promise I'll . . ." She touched her fingers to his lips, "Don't promise me>anything. I'm not stupid enough to let promises make me feel any better. How can we promise anything? I hate this, we<br>don't have any control over anything."><br>"Shhh," he said, hugging her. "I'm sorry, I won't promise you then. I'll just promise myself that I'll find you again. Have>some faith in me Linnea." <br>>She sighed and snuggled deeper into his arms. It had been easier last time, but now they were so much more to each<br>other. Amazing how just a few days together, when you thought you would never see someone again made such a>difference. She admitted to herself she was feeling less enthusiastic about the colonies and more concerned about the<br>people involved. Duo and Quatre. They were going back to space. \*\*\*\*><br>Linnea sat cross-legged in the warm sand poking at it despondently with a stick. Duo and Quatre were long gone, but

>still she sat there, too unhappy and depressed to move. She had a bad feeling. She just couldn't shake it. No one's<br>here, I can just sit out here and dry up for all anyone cares, she thought, jabbing the stick so hard it broke in half. She>threw the other half away into the distance. <br>>"Miss Linnea," Rasid said, not unsympathetically. "Come in before you get a sunburn. Don't you want some coffee?"<br>Surprisingly, she obediently stood and walked past him and into the hangar. "No thanks," she said softly. He stared at>her then stared off in the direction the two Gundams had gone. <br>

>\*\*\*\*\* Her attention was caught immediately by something out of place. Someone dressed all in black, like a priest and<br>wearing sunglasses was lounging in the lobby of the volunteer office. That was something you didn't see everyday. And>he had the nerve to peek over the top of those sunglasses and look at her as if he were amused by something. Some<br>eccentric, lazy, do-nothing like him had no business judging her, she thought. At least she had the dedication to do

>something to about the situation the colonies were in. Most of the kids today were apathetic and pursued their own  
>interests. But Hilde Schbeiker was different, she wanted to make a difference in this world. She had started out as a  
>volunteer for OZ and worked her way up to actually piloting a mobile suit. It was a great way for a young person to get  
>involved, or so she believed.

><br>Duo couldn't resist staring at the cute girl in the OZ uniform. She was looking at him too, and if looks could kill he'd have  
>been in considerable pain. Little did she know he actually deserved it. Linnea and Professor G might have disapproved of  
>his methods but he figured just being himself would be enough to fool most people about his real intentions in being  
>here. To hell with fitting in. Sure that girl had noticed him, but she'd never suspect he was more than just some guy with  
>bizarre taste in hair and clothes style. Too bad about the OZ affiliation, she was more than just cute, although she did  
>seem to take herself a bit too seriously. Something about her attitude told him that her heart was probably in the right  
>place. Most regular people didn't realize the real threat OZ posed to the future of the colonies. That's what made the  
>organization so dangerous. <br>

>"What are you looking at?" A voice broke into his thoughts. Duo looked up to see her standing over him with her hands  
>on her hips. And what nice hips they were too, he noticed appreciatively. "Since you obviously have no purpose in life I  
>thought you might want to fill out this volunteer form. There's an examination next week, if you're interested." She  
>turned to walk away, wondering to herself what had possessed her to approach him. "Will you be there if I take the  
>test, babe?" he asked as she was about to leave the room. "No," she said, surprised that he was showing interest. "I'm  
>leaving on a mission for the lunar base tomorrow. One of our responsibilities is providing defense for the mobile suit  
>factory there." <br>

>So there you have it, he thought. Duo congratulated himself on retrieving that little piece of information so easily. He  
>studied the volunteer form casually, smiling a little at the memory of her serious face. All part of the mission. Of course,  
>some parts were more pleasant than others and this part had been much more pleasant than most. He wondered what  
>her name was.

><br>Hilde shook her head to herself as she walked away. Why had she done that? She guessed she just hated to see  
>someone sitting around wasting their time like that. Oh hell, she thought suddenly, just admit it, you were trying to flirt  
>with him. He's peculiar but there's just something about him. Looking a little more flushed than usual, Hilde walked out  
>the door and down the street. She wondered if she would ever see that guy again, actually starting to wish that she  
>would.

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br>"I'm sure Captain Rasid," the scout said. "An OZ force, less than 200 miles south of this location." Rasid frowned, it had  
>been quiet for weeks. No news of Master Quatre and even Miss Linnea had received no communications from those  
>scientists she worked with up in the colonies. Lately she didn't even bother to mess with their mobile suits. And rather  
>than that fact being a relief it worried him. Did she know something, something unfavorable to do with Master Quatre  
>that

they didn't?

><br>"All right then," he said, turning his attention back to the mission. "90 percent of the force will go out and assess the

>situation. The remainder will stay here and . . ." he paused as Miss Linnea looked at him suspiciously. "The rest will stay<br>here and guard the hangar." "That's ridiculous," she said. Rasid rolled his eyes, to think he had been worried because

>she had been too quiet lately. "No one needs to stay here and babysit me. That is what you meant by guard the hangar<br>isn't it? The Sandrock isn't here and nothing needs guarding. Better yet, let me come along. Do you have a spare mobile

>suit? I can be pretty handy you know. Quatre told you, right?" Finally Rasid agreed to let her stay alone, it was better<br>than having her accompany them in a mobile suit. And her point that they would uselessly weaken their force by leaving

>men behind was well taken. <br>

>Linnea was relieved to see them go. They were always underfoot. Of course, she was the intruder in their base. But it<br>was good to be alone, totally alone. First things first. She went to the hangar and tried to contact Doktor S or Professor

>G, even the mysterious Dr. J, the unofficial leader of their little faction. No response and it didn't appear that any of her<br>transmissions had even been opened for more than a week. Was she the only one still online? What had happened to

>everyone? She wandered back to the house and started plinking out her little song on the piano, just using one hand<br>and resting her head in the other. If something didn't happen soon she would surely lose her mind.

><br>A movement caught her eye, a little flicker in the highly-polished gleam of the piano. She leaned closer and looked into

>the shining wood which was nearly as reflective as a mirror, continuing to plink away at the instrument with one hand. It<br>was a soldier, a soldier with the golden OZ insignia on his shoulder.

Standing right there. He had come through that

>window without a sound, well at least without a sound loud enough to be heard over the racket she was making. <br>

>"For a smart girl you can be so stupid," she said to herself. Was it such a crime to want to be alone and mope by herself<br>awhile? It appeared that it was. Something else caught her eye then, the knife she had "borrowed" from Rasid the first

>time Quatre had left on a mission. Catch this pal, she thought, as she grabbed it by the handle and whipped it back over<br>her head toward the figure at the window.

><br>"Nice try," a quiet voice said slowly. "But I've had knives thrown at me by someone with much better aim than yours." He

>almost smiled at the shocked look on her face as she turned around and noticed he had caught the knife easily by the<br>handle. "A word of advice, next time hold on to your weapon and don't throw it at the enemy." He turned slightly and

>casually dropped the knife out the open window. <br>

>"I'll scream," she threatened. "Then there'll be lots of guys in here, mean guys, mean guys with really sharp knives. And<br>they have much better aim than I do."

><br>"Nope," he said. "They're all gone. I made sure."

><br>"Smartass," she whispered, irritated that he knew so much.

><br>"Listen to me. I'm Trowa Barton. Quatre mentioned me, didn't he?" the soldier said.

><br>Linnea raised an eyebrow and tried to look into the soldier's face. A difficult task, considering he had long bangs which

>covered most of what appeared to be particularly attractive green eyes. "And I'm supposed to believe that an OZ poster<br>boy like you is Quatre's friend? Trowa Barton? The Gundam pilot?"

><br>"How else would I know about this place," he answered.

><br>"Then where's Quatre now," she asked.

><br>"I don't know," the soldier said. "Do you?"

><br>"If I did, I wouldn't be asking you, would I 'Trowa'? What do you want? Why are you here?" Linnea said.

><br>"I need your help," he said simply.

><br>She waited but he didn't continue. She sighed. Was she going to have to prod every tiny piece of information out of him?

><br>"Surrender," he said finally.

><br>She didn't answer.

><br>He waited. "Why," she said, resorting to a one-word answer to pay him back.

><br>"We're on the same side," he said.

><br>She couldn't take this game of one-word ping pong anymore and vented on him. "How do I know you're Trowa Barton?"

>Shouldn't you be telling me some privileged information or something? Like that you know for instance that I built<br>Gundam 05 and that Quatre plays the piano much better than I do?"

><br>"You built 02 and Quatre plays the violin. And, yes, he plays it much better than you play the piano," Trowa said briefly.

><br>"Well," she admitted, "maybe you are Trowa. But if you are, then what the hell is going on? I won't surrender without a

>damn good reason and I'm only listening to you at all because Quatre seems to think so highly of you." <br>

>Trowa sighed. He hated talking. "It's only a matter of time before OZ has the rest of the engineers and maybe even the<br>pilots captured. The colonies have betrayed us and that makes it inevitable."

><br>Linnea greeted this explanation with silence. Trowa went on, "but we'll use this opportunity to pirate OZ's resources to

>upgrade the mobile suits. Dr. J said you would know more about that than I do?" She nodded. "You have to surrender<br>for two reasons, one being that if I bring you in, it gives me credibility with OZ and secondly you can distract them from

>what's going on in space if you pretend to give them a Gundam design." <br>

>"Alright then Trowa, I'll go with you. But I swear if you're lying I'll . . . ." Linnea said. <br>

>He didn't respond and she sighed, wishing he would try a little harder to convince her she was doing the right thing by<br>going with him. But somehow his silence was almost more convincing than any words could be.

><br>TO BE CONTINUED . . .

## 5. Returning Favors, Chapter 7

Author's Note: Ohhh, how I love Gundam Wing! Everything changes and

you have no idea who is right and who is wrong half of the time, I tried to make my story like that sooooo let me know if I'm succeeding . . . please review! And if you're a fan of Treize-sama give this an eyebrow up or an eyebrow down. Wufei sez: You're doing it again! Miss Otaku: Nani???? Wufei: Begging for reviews! You're so insecure, you weak, pathetic author woman!!! Miss Otaku: ::sob:: Darn, he's right again. . .

><br>

>RETURNING FAVORS<br>

>CHAPTER 7<br>

>By YamchaOtaku<br>

><br>

> Trowa noticed her continued silence and while he couldn't say it wasn't welcome it was a bit disturbing. He could tell from short acquaintance that she liked talking as much as he liked being quiet. At first she had chattered on and on, evaluating the way he flew the transport shuttle and asking whether he thought the cockpit wouldn't suit him better if someone were to move some of the visuals lower on the panel. And then the closer they got to their destination the quieter she became. Was she having second thoughts?<br>

> Of course she was. Linnea wondered how had she let herself become a part of this again, based merely on the words of a total stranger -- Trowa Barton. He wouldn't even look her in the eyes when he talked, he hid himself behind his unruly brown bangs.<br>

> She wished herself back to the little green patch in the desert that she now called home. She felt secure there, secure behind the circular stone wall, secure in the bed she had shared with Duo those few short nights. And she had promised. She had promised Quatre she would stay there where it was safe. But Quatre trusted Trowa. They all had their missions. She was no different from the rest when it came to that. But every spark of common sense in her head was telling her that this had to be wrong.<br>

> A claustrophobic feeling of helplessness was starting to overwhelm her. There had been a time, and not very long ago, when she would have died to keep from going back where she was going now.<br>

> "Are you sure you don't know where Quatre is?" Linnea asked Trowa again. It might be a long time before she saw anyone she knew again, at this point Trowa was starting to seem like her only friend in the world. A very quiet friend, but still . . .<br>

> "To tell the truth, I was hoping you had heard from him at the desert base," the Gundam pilot in OZ uniform answered. Linnea took it as a sign of the depth of his feeling of friendship for Quatre that he had bothered to answer her at all. What was it about Quatre that after spending even a short time with him people trusted him and liked him? Because, the thought asserted itself suddenly in her head, because of all of us he's the best person.<br>

> "After he detonated the Sandrock he took a shuttle to space and I don't know what happened after that," Trowa said.<br>

> "Detonated Sandrock," Linnea repeated in a small voice. Had it had to come to that? A vision of the mobile suit loomed before her and she alone felt like she had even partially understood Quatre's pride and sense of camaraderie with the machine. To him it almost lived and breathed as DeathScythe did for her and Duo. She felt that the connection between her and Quatre, her means of supporting him in even the smallest sense had been destroyed.<br>

> "And Duo Maxwell, do you have any idea what happened to him? Trowa, please, tell me if you know anything," she begged in a frightened voice that sounded like a lost little girl's. He looked at her and something in her eyes reminded him somehow of Cathrine. Cathrine had looked like that when she asked him to promise to come back. But he

had only walked away in silence. As usual. Maybe she worried about him now, but then again maybe she had forgotten all about him. No. He was doing her an injustice by thinking that. Cathrine was the most genuine person he had ever met. He should have answered her, said something. But, what was there to say?<br>

> Trowa remembered Linnea looking at him expectantly. Just as she turned away from him and gave up hope that he would answer her, he said, "No, I don't know what happened to Duo either." <br>

> She found herself worried for Trowa suddenly. His mission was a dangerous and thankless one. "Trowa?" She saw his eyes flicker slightly from under his mask of bangs. "Take care of yourself." No answer. Of course, she hadn't really expected one. But she felt better for having said it to him.<br>

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> Hilde was irritated with herself. She frowned at herself in the mirror as she towel-dried her hair and went through her morning routine. Her blue eyes weren't as bright as usual, she'd been up half the night trying not to think about the boy she had met the day before. Even with the upcoming mission to defend the lunar base to distract her she found that she couldn't get him out of her mind. This annoyed her because she was usually all-business, completely intent on her duties. Why should she be attracted to someone so different, someone who obviously had a much different attitude toward life than she did? But she couldn't deny it, he had touched something inside of her as no one ever had before. She had had casual boyfriends among the other officers, but the relationships had never developed into anything serious. Maybe it was something different she was after. For the first time in a long time she found herself wishing she had an excuse to bow out of the mission, she wanted to stay on the colony in case that guy showed up for the military exam . . .<br>

> Hours later she was still trying to put him out of her mind when she spotted Duo, standing out amongst the clean-cut volunteers like a weed in a flower garden. Oh God, she thought, everything about him suddenly clicking in her brain. He was a rebel, a spy, and he had gotten information from her without even breaking a sweat. Ugh, how could I have imagined I was attracted to him, she berated herself. She wondered though why he seemed so nonchalant about being found out. He was being an awfully good sport about it, considering they would probably end up executing him. Despite her anger, Hilde found that the thought of his death made her stomach churn.<br>

> Duo mentally shrugged. He was right where he wanted to be. On the way to the lunar base. What were handcuffs to him? He'd end up landing on his feet in the right place at the right time to accomplish his mission. He couldn't resist giving the girl who had spotted him a wink, he'd heard the others call her Hilde. Well, Hilde, he thought, thanks for the lift. Once he was there he'd figure out a way to destroy the plant and then maybe he could think about getting back where he really wanted to be, with Linnea. She was probably bored out of her mind but at least he knew she was safe and sound in the desert . . .<br>

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> <br> "Why don't I ever get the good missions? If there's a next time, I'll be the one to rescue you." Linnea heard Duo's voice in her head. Any time now would be just perfect she thought. An incongruous picture of Duo in the DeathScythe crashing into the building to save her popped into her head and cheered her up a little. But the blue sky beyond the crystal-clear windowpane remained empty. She tensed as the door to the room opened, she willed herself not to turn around, to maintain a defiant attitude. Willed herself not to try to run out

that door screaming insanely.

><br> When the visitor failed to speak she finally turned slowly from the window. He was leaning casually against the opposite window, his blue uniform jacket contrasting artistically with the deep burgundy window coverings. A few rays of gleaming sunlight lingered on him as if their sole purpose for existence was to emphasize his beauty. And he was beautiful. Even in her terror Linnea's first thought was that this was the most beautiful man she had ever seen.

> <br> "The elusive Miss Lang," he said. "I am Col. Treize." He covered the few steps between them and lifted her hand to his lips in a formal gesture. Then he stepped back and looked at her. "I regret more than ever that I did not make your acquaintance the last time you were here," he said meaningfully.

><br> Linnea felt her cheeks grow hot and the light touch of his lips on the back of her hand throbbed like a burn. This was Treize Khushrenada?

><br> "I apologize for everything that happened to you," he said softly, he had read the report. "But let me tell you that I couldn't help being impressed that you escaped. How incompetent of them to underestimate you. Unfortunate for poor Officer Huit, however."

><br> Linnea found her voice at last and joined in the conversation. "And you, Col. Treize. The trick you played with the Alliance leaders was a brilliant maneuver. Very effective." She paused and then glanced up at him and said, "Unfortunate for the passengers on that shuttle, however."

><br> "It seems we have a mutual admiration for each other then, despite our political differences," Treize said. Something about her bothered him and suddenly he realized what it was. He took off one of his spotless white gloves and reached out to brush a streak of dirt off her cheek, but she flinched a little as he reached out and she stepped back involuntarily. Treize saw fear in her eyes and instantly decided how to progress.

><br> "Miss Lang?" he said gently. "Don't call me that," she said, it reminded her of that nasty Tsuborov. "Linnea, then, isn't it," Treize said. "Everything is different this time. You won't have to do anything you don't want to do. Think of yourself as my guest."

><br> She looked at him in disbelief. How stupid did he think she was? He saw the look. "Let me prove my intentions to you," he said, in his slow, compelling voice. He handed her his pistol. She accepted it and felt the cold weight of the weapon in her hand. If it was loaded, which she highly doubted, she could kill him right now. But then where would she be? It wasn't her mission to assassinate Treize Khushrenada. She was supposed to distract him by pretending to cooperate. Had he known what her reasoning would be? Still she felt much safer with the gun in her hand and a little of the sick, helpless feeling went away. It was something to hold on to, a defense between her and the rest of the world.

><br> "I'll leave you now," he said, as she continued to look down at the gun in her hand. "I'm sorry I have to lock the door. But some of the officers are a little afraid of you, considering your reputation." He noticed that she smiled a little at the last remark. Treize congratulated himself that he had accurately guessed her response to his gift of the pistol. It would have been rather awkward to try and wrestle it away from her if she decided to try and use it against him. But he had read her correctly.

> <br> Underneath the sloppy hair and clothes and that charming streak of grime on her cheek Miss Lang was as lovely and luminous as the moon. What potential, Treize mused. Cool beauty and a

straight-forward attitude, not to mention the ability to create a mobile suit that was easily superior to anything the organization had on its drawing boards. He looked forward to continuing his game with Miss Lang -- Linnea. Brilliant as she might be with technology, she was just a girl of 15. His reputation as a great manipulator would be in danger if he couldn't bring her around to his way of seeing things. She reminded him of the little wild birds he kept in a cage. He would gain her trust, then someday he could leave that door unlocked and she'd remain inside of her own free will.

><br> On the other side of the door, Linnea was making sure that the pistol Treize had given her was loaded.

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><br> Hilde cocked the trigger of her pistol and stepped into the room where they were keeping the prisoner. She had to find out what his purpose was. Why was he involved with the rebellion? What did he feel, where did his loyalties lie? She felt she just had to know.

><br> Duo grinned at the situation. Girls just can't keep away from me, he thought with his usual modesty. He smiled at Hilde and at the provocative situation they were in. He must be crazy, she thought, flirting at a time like this. She pointed the gun at him, putting a barrier between him and her.

><br> "This is kind of kinky babe," he said, rattling his handcuffs a little. "I hope my girlfriend never finds out about this. She's very possessive. You wouldn't want to make her angry." Girlfriend, Hilde thought in dismay. Why are all the good ones always taken? Ohhhhh, what am I thinking? Don't let him see it bothers you. "Girlfriend?" Hilde repeated casually. "And I suppose she dresses up like a nun and perpetrates terrorist attacks on innocent civilians?" "Nope," Duo grinned at the image Hilde's words created and wondered why he had brought Linnea into this in the first place. "She's the normal one in the relationship. But she does have a bad habit of pulling people's hair."

><br> "That braid of yours is such a tempting target I can see why," the words popped out of Hilde's mouth almost involuntarily and she blushed furiously as he raised an eyebrow at her.

><br> His voice grew serious then. Duo knew he should just let the issue drop but there was something about this girl. He couldn't stand to see her keep deceiving herself that she was doing the right thing. "You're on the wrong side you know," he said.

><br> Hilde gasped. That just couldn't be true. She knew herself and she believed in her motivation -- peace and protection for the colonies. Could it be possible that OZ was not the way to achieve her goals?

><br>TO BE CONTINUED . . .

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## 6. Returning Favors, Chapter 8

Author's Note: I've got the day off and I'm writing up a storm . . .

><br>

>RETURNING FAVORS<br>By YamchaOtaku

><br>CHAPTER 8

> <br>

><br> Hilde leaned against the wall and looked out the observation window at the endless vista of space. Everything sparkled and it seemed so serene, but underneath nothing was as it seemed. Nothing.



If what Duo Maxwell said was true she had been pouring all her energy into the wrong cause. It didn't make her feel any better that she had been doing it for all the right reasons.

><br> And what he said was true, she knew it. Looking into his incredible dark blue eyes she had seen nothing but truth. If only she knew what to do about it.

><br> He admitted to being a Gundam pilot and to anyone affiliated with OZ that occupation shouted enemy loud and clear. They were the cause of all the conflict between Earth and the colonies. Or so she had believed. According to Duo, what right did OZ or anyone have interfering in the government of the colonies. OZ was a grasping, dominating organization that wanted to have control over both Earth and space. All the Gundams were trying to do was stop that, in any way they could. Duo hadn't asked for her help.

><br> "I just thought you should know what you're doing," he had said. "I really think you're the kind of person who would want to know."

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> ". . . beautiful," Treize finished. Linnea nodded absently, her mind trying to wrap itself around the conflicting thoughts inside. Certainly the Earth was a beautiful place. It seemed so open and enormous to a girl who had spent her entire life on a space colony. She loved being a colonial, the mere engineering marvel of the space colonies existence made her proud to be a part of it all, part of the generation born in space, with no connection holding her to the Earth from which they all originated. And yet, looking through Treize's eyes she could see that Earth was even more of a wonder, a natural wonder that touched the senses with its beauty. <br>

> He was a busy man and Linnea was an early riser. His usual companion, Lady Une, was directing his interests in space so he could devote these early hours to showing the girl how close to the same opinions they really were, that she was just a philosophical step away from supporting his efforts. The sunrise colors, the dewy grass, the uninterrupted bird song of dawn marked the time they spent together. And he was the only one she had contact with, he made sure of that. He wanted her loyal to him, not OZ. A change was coming. She was leaning against the balcony with the morning breeze teasing the loose strands of her hair. What a beautiful instrument of destruction she could be, his little colonial engineer. <br>

> Linnea tried to shake off her growing affinity for Treize. She had a feeling she was in over her head trying to deal with the Commander-in-Chief of the Organization of the Zodiac's forces. She told herself he was the devil tempting her ambition and arousing her senses. The devil -- Epyon. And, as always when inspired by someone, her thoughts turned to Gundam design. That was what she was here for after all and she had a nagging idea in her head that would be a definite distraction for Col. Treize. Epyon . . . She spent the rest of the day hunched over her computer keyboard, letting her imagination run wild, freeing an inspiration that had started the day she and Quatre had seen the plans for Gundam Zero.<br>

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><br> Duo calculated the time they had traveled and the distance to the lunar base. It was time to make his move. This was what he excelled at, the daring escape, the close calls, leaving the enemy with their mouths hanging open in disbelief at his audacity. Seemingly without effort he discarded his handcuffs and made for the mobile suit bay on the ship.

><br> Hilde could only watch in stunned admiration as Duo took off into space, on track for the lunar base. He had even taken time out

to wave goodbye to her with an enormous grin plastered on his face. She understood him now. He lived to protect the colonies, it was what he was born to do and he was damned good at it too. And it was what she wanted to be doing to, preferably at his side. She admitted to herself that she had a bad case of hero worship for Duo Maxwell.

><br> As the rest of her former compatriots sprang into action, Hilde ran ahead, fired up her mobile suit and shot herself into space behind Duo. That guy was going to need some back up.

><br> Duo smirked as he noticed he had company. "Prepare to meet Shinigami fellas," he said out loud. Of course Shinigami was going to have to make do without his Gundam, but as Linnea always swore, the pilot was more important than the mobile suit. Still, Duo felt hampered by the inadequacies of the enemy Leo suit. It was just so totally uncool, unlike the DeathScythe. Battle just wasn't as much fun without the custom mobile suit that was his identity as a Gundam pilot. And with DeathScythe he always felt Linnea was with him in the fight, that they were working together toward the same goal.

><br> "Wherever you are baby, wish me luck," he thought, as he turned the suit and started blasting away at the enemy with an unsatisfying lack of power.

><br> A voice injected itself into his cockpit. "Go on ahead, I'll distract them! Good luck . . ."

><br> Was it that girl? Hilde? So, he had changed her mind. He just hoped she didn't get herself killed.

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> It was like a reunion of sorts.<br>

> Instead of destroying the lunar base, Duo had found DeathScythe. And like his allies before him he found himself captured again. But it wasn't so bad, just boring. And there was the promise of a new, improved Gundam to look forward to. He never wanted to be back in an inferior mobile suit again. Linnea had shown him some of the early work on the DeathScythe upgrade and it was going to be awesome.<br>

> If only he didn't have to sit here and play possum while those old guys got the work done. If only he could get these other guys to loosen up and at least talk to him to pass the time, but Wufei and Heero were both about as much fun as a pair of tombstones.<br>

> All three pilots looked up as the door opened. Three pairs of eyes filled with cold rage when they recognized who it was. Their former comrade-in-arms, Trowa Barton.<br>

> Duo shook his head in irritation. They wanted Heero to test pilot some new mobile suit. They wanted the wrong guy, why use Heero when the best Gundam pilot was sitting right here and bored out of his mind.<br>

> As he and Heero left, Trowa turned to Duo, as if he had just remembered something he had meant to tell him. <br>

> "Oh, by the way, I saw a friend of yours back on Earth," Trowa said.<br>

> Duo stared at the ceiling as if anything Trowa had to say was of supreme indifference to him.<br>

> "You must be interested?" Trowa said, trying to prod out a response. "Come on Duo. Blonde, smart, lives in the desert and has a tendency to attack people with knives."<br>

> Duo looked at him then.<br>

> Trowa tried to remember some other little detail about Linnea to push Duo over the edge and give him the distraction he needed. The corner of his mouth turned up the tiniest bit as he remembered something he'd noticed as he watched her go up the stairs to OZ

headquarters just ahead of him.<br>

> "And, oh yeah, she's got a nice ass."<br>

> Wufei and Heero looked on impatiently as Duo's face turned bright red, faded to shocked white and then got red again. It was like looking at a train wreck, it was ghastly but you couldn't look away. They wondered why Trowa and Duo were choosing this inopportune moment to have it out over some weak, worthless woman (Wufei) or annoying, unnecessary distraction (Heero) depending on how you looked at it.<br>

> "What did you do, Trowa," Duo said angrily, standing up but finding it a little hard to look threatening while wearing handcuffs.<br>

> "Hey," Trowa said. "I helped her out actually. She needed a lift to the organization's headquarters and since I was in the neighborhood, I offered. Well, actually, I had to talk her into it. But it wasn't too difficult. Women can be so fickle you know."<br>

> A bizarre reenactment of Hilde holding a gun on him while he was handcuffed to that chair on the OZ shuttle shuffled itself in his mind replacing Hilde with Trowa and Linnea with himself.. Dammit, he had been so sure she was safe. Trowa. Someday that little traitor was going to come face to face with Shinigami and then he'd be so dead they wouldn't even want him in hell . . .<br>

> Trowa's voice broke into his thoughts suddenly. "The point is, she had a message for you," he said innocently.<br>

> "Well . . ." Duo said.<br>

> He gasped as Trowa socked him hard in the stomach, he barely felt the other pilot press a small object into his hand. Before he could recover, Trowa and Heero had left. "Shit," Duo groaned. "Who died and made me the local punching bag?" Wufei rolled his eyes in annoyance at Duo's antics. He was not amused. <br>

> Duo looked at his palm, in it was a tiny projector. He pressed a button and instantly an image of the DeathScythe projected onto his face, blinding him momentarily. He turned the projector around in the other direction and the mobile suit appeared on the wall. Duo started to laugh, almost hysterically and Wufei couldn't help but back away from him a few feet. It was true, he thought, he was trapped in here with a madman. "Well, I'll be goddamned. That guy's quite an actor, he should quit his day job," Duo said.<br>

> "What the hell are you babbling about now," Wufei asked, his curiosity finally piqued.<br>

> "Don't you get it," Duo asked. "He's still on our side. It's all a ruse. Here hold this a minute." <br>

> Wufei took the projector and pressed the button again and his eyes glowed softly as an image of his Gundam appeared on the wall.

"Nataku," he muttered quietly.<br>

> "Hey, click back to my mobile suit," Duo said, trying awkwardly to swat Wufei. Wufei merely scowled and ignored him but after awhile he reversed the projector and brought the DeathScythe image back up. Duo walked up to the wall and bent down to the far righthand corner of screen. There it was, in the tiniest of print. LLGMS02PEAC195. It was a message<br>

> "I'm still gonna kick Trowa's butt when I get outta here," he announced to no one in particular. Wufei looked at him expectantly, interested despite himself in Duo's ongoing monologue. "That comment about my girl's ass was definitely uncalled for. Of course, it's true. But he didn't have any business noticing. I don't think it was part of his mission."<br>

> He convinced himself that she would be alright, that she could take care of herself. She had done it before after all. He would definitely do something special for her when he saw her again. Duo

thought awhile. Flowers, he'd never given her flowers. He supposed girls must like that kind of thing. A dozen red roses then, the next time he saw her. No, she wasn't like that. He knew exactly what they would both prefer, the two of them alone together, clothing optional. To hell with the roses . . .<br>

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> "Do you like roses," Treize asked, handing her a single, pale yellow rosebud tinged with pale pink. "A Peace rose?" Linnea asked, touching the petals gently. "Red roses are so cliché," Treize said. "This type suits you better. I saw it and thought of you." It was true, Treize was nothing if not sincere. The delicate yellow petals of the rose reminded him of her hair and her cheeks had been that color pink when he had kissed her hand. He had been careful not to touch her since and he was actually finding it rather difficult. She gestured toward the screen, granting him permission to look at the design she had been working on. She leaned against the desk and waited for his reaction.<br>

> The mobile suit that was becoming a reality on her computer screen was the most awe-inspiring mechanical design Treize had ever seen. It put what he knew of the other Gundams to shame. He could hardly believe she had designed it, that she had such things within her. And he had inspired her, he could see himself in it. She had that power, to turn a soldier into a god. <br>

> His blue eyes looked at her admiringly. And she got a feeling inside of her that was not at all unpleasant. She was the first to look away.<br>

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> The God of Death was not having a good day. Sure, he had escaped from a boring death and a boring prison cell. But now he was stuck on this colony with a Gundam in need of major repairs. A difficult task without Linnea or even Howard to lend a hand, not to mention a shortage of parts and funds. And he had no purpose, no more mission. The world was turned upside down and pieces of it were cascading all around him.<br>

> "DUO!!" an excited feminine voice called out. He looked in the direction the voice came from and smiled. His day was getting better.<br>

> "Hilde? What are you doing here?" he asked.<br>

> "I live here of course. How about you?"<br>

> "You could say I'm stranded for the moment," he answered.<br>

> "I bet you need somewhere to stay," Hilde offered, taking his arm and giving it an exuberant squeeze as she led him off to her apartment. "You can sleep on my couch."<br>

> Duo didn't protest, a couch was much better than the cold, hard ground he had been using. And right now he needed a friend.<br>

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> Linnea double-checked the program virus she constantly updated when working on the Epyon design. She might seem to be working for Treize now but she wasn't about to let her game get out of hand. Epyon was just a fantasy Gundam after all, it should never actually be constructed. She had to be sure of that. My God, after all it had the capacity to wipe out an entire colony with a single blow. It was really too much, like Col. Treize himself actually. She should really stop working on it. She knew the Gundam pilots had escaped, her mission was complete. But she admitted to herself that she was obsessed with Epyon. There had never been anything like it before, except perhaps the Gundam Zero. She knew now why it had never been built. It was too dangerous.<br>

> She heard the familiar click of the lock on her door and closed

down the completed virus program hastily. It would be a surprise for Col. Treize and it would be ruined if he saw it too soon. <br>  
> Her eyes widened as he said her name urgently. He seemed to have lost a bit of his characteristic aplomb and confidence, but only for a second.<br>  
> "We have to talk," he said to her, she noticed a number of soldiers lingering outside her door. "I wanted to tell you myself that I plan to resign from OZ this afternoon. As you and I have discussed I cannot be a part of an organization that takes battles out of the hands of men and places the destiny of Earth and space in the power of mindless machines."<br>  
> "They approved the mobile dolls. That's insanity," Linnea agreed.<br>  
> "I regret to say that I will no longer have access to you, after this," he said.<br>  
> Where did that leave her, Linnea wondered. She couldn't believe Col. Treize would leave her like this. He saw the beginnings of panic in her eyes.<br>  
> "Linnea, I promise you will be safe. Though I'll be gone, the soldiers still think highly of me and they know my wishes where you are concerned," he said.<br>  
> "Col. Treize . . ." she started.<br>  
> "Again," he interrupted her. "Let me say that leaving you here is my only regret. Eventually, you understand, I'll go home to Luxembourg."<br>  
> She looked puzzled.<br>  
> "I would be very happy if you could find your way there someday, Linnea," he said.<br>  
> Although she tried to hide it, she looked and felt very vulnerable at the moment. He had been all that stood between her and OZ. Old fears darted back into her head like birds returning to their nest.<br>  
> "I know you can find a way," he said again, trying to put meaning behind the words.<br>  
> And then he took her in his arms and kissed her.<br>  
> For a moment her mind couldn't take it in, he had never even touched her since that first day. She pushed her hands up between them to break it off but he only pulled her closer and the buttons of his coat pressed themselves almost painfully into her body.<br>  
> So, she was shocked. He had meant her to be, he was shocked himself. She was only 15, but he admired her. In every way. Then he felt her body seem to melt and her lips parted under his. He almost lost control of the moment. But he was Treize Khushrenada after all. He pressed the metal key he held into her hand. "Find a way," he said again, allowing his gloved hand to brush itself over her hair once. He looked into her eyes and left the room.<br>  
> TO BE CONTINUED . . .<br>  
> <p><p>

## 7. Returning Favors, Chapter 9

>Author's Note: Thanks for all the recent kind reviews, I hope to post Chapters 10 & 11 later this week. Check out my author's page to see Linnea's GW profile and a fanart!!<br>  
><br>RETURNING FAVORS  
>By YamchaOtaku<br>  
>CHAPTER 9<br>  
><br>

> Linnea's heart raced as she bumped into something solid in the dark, something . . . human. She had never fainted before but she felt like she was going to right now. And then she realized that nothing was happening, no alarms were sounding, no bright lights flashing. The soldier she had bumped into merely stepped aside. "Be more careful ma'am," he whispered respectfully before returning his attention to inspecting the wall.<br>

> Col. Treize's words echoed in her head, "the soldiers still think highly of me and they know my wishes concerning you." She was amazed by the devotion Treize inspired in these men. Even from a distance he controlled her fate. Then she forced herself to stop thinking about Treize and continued to get the hell out of there. She had to try to find her real self again.<br>

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> Relena Peacecraft gazed out the window at the peaceful beauty of the Cinq Kingdom. Her duties as princess and purveyor of absolute pacifism weighed heavily on her young shoulders. Sometimes she felt she was in a fairy tale, a demented fairy tale. It had all started on her 15th birthday. Everything she believed about herself, her family and the world was shattered. Since then she had found out she was a princess and met a boy who touched a part of her she never knew existed. And now she needed him. She would always need him. He was a symbol to her, a symbol of the wrong caused by war. Wrongs done to individuals. Wrongs that changed them from the good people they were inside to potential killers. And he was more than that. She knew that she had fallen in love with him. The Heero he was deep inside or the Heero created by the war, it made no difference. She loved him with all her heart. And she would create a peaceful world for them to live in.<br>

> "Heero," she whispered out loud. "If you were here I'd be so much stronger. A much better person. Like you are."<br>

> She knew he was alive. He was a part of her somehow and if he were dead she would know it. Though she hated war she saw that Heero was good at what he did, eerily perfect in fact. He would survive and they would be together again. When there was peace he would see that they could be together and so she strove for that peace with all her considerable will.<br>

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><br> He had been so surprised. He thought she was just a girl but her kiss was a woman's kiss, an experienced woman's kiss. Without even knowing it, Linnea had just scored a point in the game between herself and Treize Khushrenada. It wasn't over yet. And he told himself that he wouldn't let it be over until he had her complete and unconditional surrender. She would come to him, he was certain of it. And when she did it wouldn't end with a simple kiss. When he had her on his side the world would be his, and under his complete control the world would be a far better place. Treize sincerely believed that.

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><br> "Miss Relena," a voice interrupted Relena's rare moment of private time and she sighed. "There's someone here that I think you should talk with. This situation is going to require a decision from you, I think I know what you'll decide but you really need to talk to the person first," Lucrezia Noin explained. As always, Relena hoped that any surprise visitor might be Heero but as the person entered the room she could immediately tell it wasn't him. It was only a girl, about her age. She looked tired and bedraggled, almost as if she had hitchhiked across Europe for several days.

><br> Linnea was exhausted, she had in fact been hitchhiking across Europe for several days. She had no intention of stopping to visit

any old acquaintances in Luxembourg and she was too far from the desert base to return there. And everyone knew that the Cinq Kingdom was one of the few places in the world where someone could hide from conflict for awhile. She needed to hide, she needed to think. She needed to ask Miss Peacecraft if she could stay awhile.

><br> Relena's interest was caught when the girl told her she had worked with the rebellion, on the Gundam project in fact.

><br> "Tell me," the princess said, twirling a strand of her honey-colored hair anxiously, "do you know Heero Yuy?"

><br> Although Linnea had heard of him she had never met Heero Yuy. She certainly would like to though. She knew Doctor J considered Heero to be the foremost Gundam pilot but she was sure he couldn't touch Duo's abilities, whoever he was. Dr. J had his personal favorite and she had hers. Miss Peacecraft's tone when she asked about Heero reminded her of her own longing for Duo. They had been apart for far too long and she needed him, she needed him to make her remember herself and what she believed in.

><br> Relena sighed again, she seemed to sigh so often these days. She looked at Miss Noin, who nodded her approval. "Welcome to the Cinq Kingdom, Miss Lang. We'd be happy to provide you with political asylum for as long as you wish to stay."

><br> "I'm very grateful Miss Peacecraft," Linnea answered. "But please call me Linnea."

><br> "Very well," Relena said. "And you must call me Relena. Can we talk later, I'd like to learn more about the Gundams if you can tell me?"

><br> "Of course," Linnea said, barely containing a yawn. She had been awake for more than 48 hours straight. "But excuse me, right now I really need a nap."

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><br> Duo couldn't sleep. When he shut his eyes he saw it happening again. Saw the blast from the Zero's buster rifle strike the colony, felt the anticipation as the colony just hung there in space for a moment, felt the sick exhilaration he had felt when the colony exploded into nothingness. And overlaid on top of it all with a dreamlike transparency was Hilde's face. Would he ever be able to forget that nightmarish vision, the product of the Zero system? It had been so real that his mind and body were reacting like it had actually happened.

><br> Hilde was aware of Duo, awake in the next room. Even after the brief time they had spent together she knew his moods like her own. She had never imagined he could be like he had been tonight. A quiet Duo was an unnatural Duo. What had happened to leave the guy who always had something to say about everything speechless? As usual he had performed heroically, crushing hordes of mobile dolls and driving that maniacal OZ zealot away from the colony with little effort.

><br> She crept softly into the living room and saw him sitting there with his eyes wide and alert. "Want to talk about it," she offered, in a soft, gentle voice. He shook his head but he gave her a bare smile, a far cry from the huge grin she was familiar with. "Mind if I just sit up with you awhile then," she asked again. This time he nodded.

><br> Hilde sat down next to him and pulled the blanket up over herself, shivering a little. "Cold?" he asked. "A little," she answered. He put his arm around her and pulled her close to him. But still he didn't speak. After awhile Hilde found she couldn't keep her eyes open, she was so warm under the blanket and life felt so perfect with his arm around her. She let her head drop to his shoulder and she let herself fall asleep. "Lucky," Duo thought, looking at the

sleeping girl. But eventually the warm weight of her body against his and the regular sound of her even breathing put him to sleep too. And there weren't any bad dreams.

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> <br> There was something familiar about the Cinq Kingdom's newest arrival, but Noin couldn't put her finger on it at first. Was it the way she twirled her wine glass gracefully or the way she came into a room and unconsciously arranged herself in the most flattering position, in front of a midnight blue velvet curtain or beside a candle that would flicker and bring out golden highlights in her pale hair? It reminded her of someone she knew and when she figured it out she was stunned.

> <br> Linnea Lang had obviously spent a great deal of time with Treize Khushrenada, enough time to have picked up several of his classic habits. And she was obviously restless and bored here in the Cinq Kingdom. Noin felt she had better have a talk with that girl as soon as possible. She had to find out just what had occurred between her and Col. Treize. His charisma and charm could be a very dangerous combination. Just look how he had affected Zechs all those years and an even more extreme example was the way Lady Une -- who should have been a strong woman and a leader in her own right -- worshipped him and rushed to fulfill his every whim. Yes, she had better have a talk with Linnea right away and find out just how deep the connection was between the Gundam technician and Col. Treize.

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><br> Getting his hands on the Epyon design without attracting Linnea's notice had been a slight challenge, but not as difficult as Treize had expected. He had expected her to be a bit more diligent about keeping her design under wraps. Perhaps he had given her too much credit, he had to remind himself over and over that she was just 15. Or as she said, "almost 16", as if that made a world of difference. He smiled as he thought of the way her violet eyes sparkled at him as she had said that. He was actually missing her, Linnea, and not just what she could do for him.

><br> The program opened and there it was before him -- Epyon. Scratch what he had just thought, Linnea deserved all the credit in the world. Every time he looked at the mobile suit schematics his awe at her genius increased. Behind Epyon the Treize Faction would certainly emerge victorious. He looked at the screen again, numbers were flashing swiftly across the bottom of the screen and he realized they were page numbers. They were the numbers of all the odd-numbered pages of the program that were deleting themselves every time he touched the keypad.

><br> Touche Linnea. I underestimated you again, he thought. But there was no bitterness in his reaction. Only a renewal of his admiration for her.

><br> She had amazed him yet again. And now he definitely needed her there. His sources had let him know she escaped days ago and today the amusing visit from his uncle, Duke Dermail.

><br> "Your Miss Lang has escaped us again," Duke Dermail had said in irritation as his nephew sat in a leather chair twirling his wine glass. "I suppose you'll never admit to having had something to do with it Treize? Hundreds of soldiers in the halls and not a one catches a glimpse of her leaving? Damned girl erased every last bit of data she inputted in that computer and a lot of things she didn't before she left. Treize? Say something, or has seclusion left you speechless?"

><br> "Why I'm as surprised as you are Uncle. My condolences. Miss Lang was a brilliant engineer. A great loss to the organization I'm sure," he had answered.



><br> And yet still she had not arrived in Luxembourg. Where could she be?

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> Dorothy scanned the classroom. One could only take so many of Miss Relena's endless lectures explaining the merits of absolute pacifism. Especially if you had the attitude of Dorothy Catalonia. It was only amusing for so long before one got bored out of one's mind. So she looked around the room for something to interest her. All she saw were rows of girls in neat, prim red blazers denoting their status as students of the Cinq Kingdom. All of them looked at Miss Relena with a semi-fanatical glow in their eyes, sitting up straight at their desks with every button buttoned and every hair neatly in place. All of them, except for one.<br>

> "Aaah, the new girl," Dorothy thought. The girl had been here several days but Dorothy had thought she was unworthy of her notice. She was about to change her mind. <br>

> The new girl leaned forward over her desk with her cheek resting on one hand. It was obvious that she wasn't hearing one word of Miss Relena's impassioned speech. Her blazer was unbuttoned as were several buttons at the neckline of her proper white blouse. She was idly doodling something in her notebook as Miss Relena talked on and on to her otherwise enraptured audience.<br>

> When the class finally ended, Linnea came back to attention with a start. She had tried to listen to Relena's talk but after awhile her innate common sense couldn't take it anymore. Absolute pacifism was a great idea, she agreed with that. But it was only possible on paper and in textbooks. Not in the real world, a world populated by people with so many different agendas. She looked down at her notebook and saw that she had sketched Epyon. She hadn't even known she had been drawing it. Her face flushed a little as she remembered Treize's admiring eyes upon her as she showed him the designs. <br>

> It had been very difficult for her to delete the program, to erase Epyon from existence. Of course it still existed in her mind and if she knew Treize, he had a copy of the program. An unusable copy, thanks to her virus. She violently ripped the page from the notebook, crumpled it up tightly and tossed it into the wastebasket as she walked out the door. She pulled off the hideous red jacket and tossed it over her shoulder. She had an appointment to chat with Miss Noin. She desperately needed to talk to someone.<br>

> Dorothy watched Linnea's little display with curious eyes. She peered into the trashcan. Would she, Dorothy Catalonia, stoop to picking through a wastebasket? Then she smiled to herself. Even the wastebaskets here in the Cinq Kingdom were squeaky clean, as squeaky clean as Miss Relena herself. She wouldn't be dirtying her hands at all. <br>

> She unwrapped the crushed piece of paper and smoothed out the wrinkles. What she saw made her gasp and her heart thumped in exhilaration. It was a mobile suit. More fantastic and with more destructive power than anything even her mind could have come up with. Who was she? Who in the world was that girl?<br>

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> "How do you like it here in the Cinq Kingdom," Noin asked Linnea, although it was obvious that the girl from the colonies was having trouble fitting in. She had dropped her jacket casually on the grass and she was plucking distastefully at the demure, ankle-length skirt worn by all the girls at the Institute. Noin smiled sympathetically. Her unhappiness was very apparent.<br>

> She tried to decide how to bring up the subject of Treize and decided to just come out with it. "What happened while you were at OZ

headquarters?" Noin asked. "Do you feel like you want to talk about it. I'd like to be your friend if you feel you can trust me." Linnea did like Noin, of all the people in the Cinq Kingdom, the ex-OZ lieutenant was the only one she could relate to. <br>

> "I do want to talk about it," Linnea said. "I need to talk about it, but I just don't know what to say. I don't really know what happened. I thought I knew myself. I thought I was sure of my feelings. But now I'm so unsure of everything. It's as if all the lines are blurred and I don't know what's right or wrong anymore."<br>

> Classic Treize syndrome, Noin thought. She hadn't been immune to it. No one she knew had been immune to it. <br>

> As if she had read Noin's mind, Linnea spoke. "You worked for OZ, you knew Col. Treize. What do you think of him?"<br>

> Noin didn't like the tone Linnea's voice took when she said Treize's name. Linnea probably didn't notice herself that her eyes shone a little brighter and her face became more animated when she said it. Dammit, Noin thought, she's probably already a lost cause. I can't believe she's not on her way to Luxembourg right now. What can I say to her?<br>

> She took a deep breath. "Linnea, Treize is the most charming, charismatic man in the world. If he wasn't, he wouldn't be so powerful. Lots of people, powerful, intelligent people are so enthralled by him that they forsake their own ideals to support him," Noin explained.<br>

> Linnea knew that was all true.<br>

> "And I'm just one of the stupid sheep fascinated by his charming personality," Linnea said bitterly. <br>

> "It doesn't mean you're stupid," Noin said gently. "Like I said, he's done it to people older and more experienced than you. The fact that you came here and didn't go to Luxembourg says a lot about you Linnea. Try to realize that he was just using you to get what you could give to him."<br>

> "I know that, I always knew it," Linnea said. "But there's something about him Lucrezia. Why can't I resist it? I know it's wrong."<br>

> "The problem with Treize is that he himself believes everything he tells people. It's not an act," Noin said. "That's exactly who he is."<br>

> Linnea only felt worse, not better. Well, she felt a bit better because Noin understood how she felt and didn't blame her. But what she said about Treize believing everything he told people bothered her. Did that mean he felt something for her? And what about that kiss? She stopped that thought dead in its tracks. None of that mattered, it shouldn't matter one bit. She had Duo, she loved Duo, and he had promised to find her. But who knew when that would be? She couldn't talk about Treize anymore, so she changed the subject.<br>

> "Lucrezia, do you have any clothes I can borrow?" she begged. "I can't attend any more of Relena's classes and this uniform is just too ugly! Please???"<br>

> Noin laughed and agreed to lend Linnea something. She was glad to see evidence that Linnea was still a normal teenager after all. Too many of them were too involved in the conflict, they didn't have time to be young.<br>

> She felt so much older than Linnea, Relena and all the girls at the Institute. But Lucrezia Noin was only 19. And Zechs was the same age. He'd been one of the people she thought about, one of the people who had been fascinated by Treize. But she had always been more fascinated, even obsessed, with the man known as the Lightning Count

than with his commander. She pictured his long, fair hair, the hair she dreamed of touching; she saw his incredible blue eyes looking at her with friendship and gentle affection. But she wanted so much more. Would he ever care for her the way she cared for him? Oh Zechs, Noin thought, I'm only here in the Cinq Kingdom because of you. This is your dream and I'll see that it comes true, whether you are here or not. She wished she had a memory of a kiss, but so far that had only occurred in her dreams. She remembered every touch of the hand and counted every minute that they were apart. Unfortunately the minutes apart outweighed the times they were together by way too much.<br>

> Linnea was looking down at her Cinq Kingdom skirt. She was remembering when she went to high school with Duo back on the colony. She had been so happy then, comparatively carefree and best of all she had been sure of herself. She and all the other girls had rolled up the waistbands of their skirts until they were shockingly short and the teachers had been appalled. Duo had always teased her to roll it up one more inch and she had laughed at him and pulled his braid. She missed him so much. Find me Duo, please, she thought, nearly praying to the God of Death. Find me and make me laugh. Make me forget everything but you.<br>

>TO BE CONTINUED . . . <br>

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## 8. Returning Favors, Chapter 10

Author's Note: Definitely rated R, I finally got up the courage to write a real lemon . . . --blush--

><br>RETURNING FAVORS

>By YamchaOtaku<br>

><br>Chapter 10

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> Dorothy looked again at the drawing of the mobile suit she had found. What should she do with it? She could keep it and dream dreams of the destruction it could wreak if it was built, but what good what that do. She had no way to build it. The more she studied the design the more she was determined to find out about the new girl. Her name had been Lydia or something like that. She had paid no attention when Miss Relena introduced her to them. She paid no attention to those she had no use for. But Lydia, or whatever her name was, would definitely be worth knowing.<br>

> She got an idea then. Why not send the drawing to her poor cousin Treize? It would be the right thing to do, to write a letter to cheer up someone who was under house arrest. She smiled, she doubted Treize was suffering much. And he was someone who had the resources to bring a mobile suit design such as this one to reality.<br>

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> Quatre thought about what he and Heero had heard about the Cinq Kingdom. He could always go back to the desert base, but he couldn't face the Maganacs, couldn't face Linnea after what he had become. He was happy to think about anything to take his mind off Trowa. Trowa dying a horrible lonely death in space. Because of him.<br>

> Heero was trying to think of a reason not to go to the Cinq Kingdom. It brought an unwanted vision of Relena. Unwanted but not unloved. The idea of Relena was the only pure, untainted idea left to him. He had failed as a soldier. He had failed at his mission. Relena slipped through his mind as insubstantial as the scent of a spring flower or a sunbeam passing through a crystal. Heero did not believe in pacifism, but a part of him, deep in his heart, believed that if

he saw her again he might be able to renew his dedication to fight.  
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> Which of course was the opposite of what Relena would have wanted for him.<br>

> Quatre wondered what spurred Heero's change of heart when he suddenly agreed to accompany him to the Cinq Kingdom.<br>

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> <br> The Cinq Kingdom had its positive points, Linnea thought, one being that it must be the most beautiful place on Earth. Whoever had designed the landscaping and architecture must have been an avid reader of fairy tales. A dream-like palace situated on a sparkling lake. A climate where the sun shone in a cloudless sky. The very existence of the tiny, perfect kingdom was almost enough to make you believe the true peace could be achieved. Almost.

><br> Linnea was lonely and bored. Lucrezia Noin had gone off somewhere, but when she returned she had promised to give Linnea a peek at the secret defense system she had put together behind Relena's back. That was something to take her mind off her problems. But until then . . . She sighed. She was so different from everyone here. They didn't know, couldn't know what she had seen, what she had done, what she had felt. War wasn't even a reality to most of them. Relena had experienced it but she met it with complete belief in her position. Linnea didn't have that anymore.

><br> So until Noin got back she had taken over this little corner of the garden. She felt like it was her own secret place to hide from the world. A secluded spot with a perfect cushioned wicker couch just far enough away that when you looked behind you the entire palace was in perfect view. She curled up with a history book, hooking one leg over the arm of the couch and twirling a strand of her hair with her finger. The other girls thought she was strange and eccentric, slopping around in Noin's hand-me-downs. But that was who she was, she wanted to at least keep that much of herself.

><br> Besides, she wasn't the strangest person in the Cinq Kingdom. There was another girl that was as out of place as she, although she put up a facade of fitting in. Her name was Dorothy and sometimes it seemed like she was watching her, watching her with a calculating look on her face, watching her as if she knew who she really was. But she was probably just being paranoid.

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> Relena hung up the telephone receiver. Heero. He was coming. Miss Noin was bringing him to the Cinq Kingdom.<br>

> She remembered when she had first seen him, found him on the beach, the fear in her heart that the boy she saw was already dead. <br>

> And now he would be here, he had come back to her. She had been sure that he must think of her, as she thought of him. He was always in her mind, the first thought in the morning, the last thought at night.<br>

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> The students of the Cinq Kingdom were buzzing and only one thing got teenage girls buzzing like these girls were buzzing. All the commotion was about BOYS!! There were two new students and they were boys, good-looking boys. It was enough to make the dining room sound like a hive of happy bees.<br>

> Linnea shrugged, sipped her coffee and looked out the window overlooking the lake. The only boy she cared about was Duo and he would certainly never end up as a student in the Cinq Kingdom. That was too preposterous for her to even imagine. <br> Gundam pilots as students in this place? Never. Although she was sure the appearance

of someone like Duo would give these sheltered girls a thrill. She smiled at the thought. There was someone walking down by the lake but it was too far to see clearly. Must be one of the new boys, she was surprised one or more of the excited girls hadn't spotted and locked the poor guy on target. The morning sun glinted off his hair and she continued watching him without knowing why. The way he moved was familiar and that hair, hair like her own. That couldn't be Quatre . . . she jumped out of the chair, knocking over her coffee cup, cursed softly and stopped to soak up the coffee with a white linen napkin then dashed out the door and down to the lake.

><br> Dorothy had been watching Linnea and she too had spotted the boy down by the lake. Could Linnea, that was her name and not Lydia, be as boy crazy as the rest of the girls in this place? Dorothy wondered where these boys had come from anyway. Showing up here in the middle of the semester was seemed very sudden and very suspicious.

><br> Quatre was touched by the peace and beauty of the Cinq Kingdom. It was something worth protecting. Defending the Cinq Kingdom was defending peace, a place where peace for the Earth and space could be nurtured and then fighting would end and no one would ever do horrible things to other people, like he had done to Trowa . . . his thoughts were interrupted by a hand on his shoulder. A familiar voice said his name, "Quatre?"

><br> Linnea, he thought. She couldn't be here so far from the desert. Part of him wished it could be true the other part was afraid to face her. She would want to know what he had done, she would ask where Duo was and he didn't know. She would see in his face that something was horribly wrong. But Quatre was also the most compassionate people in existence and her being here wasn't right. Maybe he wasn't the only one who had had bad experiences since they had last been together . . .

><br> "It's really you!" they both said together, both noticing that something had changed about the other, but unable to pinpoint exactly what that was. He seemed to want to keep his distance from her as if he was trying to hide something and yet she knew he was happy to see her, as glad as she was to see him. He saw that her eyes were troubled although she smiled at him happily. She'd always been confident, in charge of every situation she found herself in, always knew exactly what to do. But there was something hesitant about her now, like she was waiting for someone to tell her what to do, as if she was looking for someone to reassure her. They both looked away from the searching gaze of the other and back out over the lake.

><br> "How did you get here," they said again, both at the same time. "You go first," Quatre said, always polite, but Linnea suspected he wanted to put off talking about himself.

><br> "Then you don't know," she said. "You never met up with Trowa? He came and found me at the desert base, when the other scientists surrendered to OZ I did too. Eventually I got tired of waiting for him to come back for me so I escaped on my own. I came here." She had left out a lot details, but that was the basic truth.

><br> "You met Trowa," Quatre repeated.

> <br> "I'm sorry I didn't stay in the desert. Sorry I broke my promise to stay there." Linnea said. "If only I had. If only . . ." she added with a note of desperation that he missed, lost as he was in thoughts of Trowa. Trowa floating away into space . . . "But," she continued. "I knew you trusted Trowa, I thought then it was for the best. And he worried about you too Quatre, he told me about Sandrock. You know how he is, just the fact that he would talk to me about you told me how much he considered you a friend. I wonder what could have

happened to him?"

><br> She looked at him and saw tears on his face.

><br> "Trowa's dead. I killed Trowa," he said starkly, looking out over the shining lake without seeing it, seeing instead the vast starry blackness of space.

><br> Linnea gasped. It had been comforting to think that the Gundam pilots were nearly immortal and yet she had had a feeling about Trowa when she left him that he was in a vulnerable position, passing himself off as the enemy. Trowa. Dead.

><br> She sat down and wrapped her arms around her knees trying to absorb the fact that Trowa was dead, killed by another Gundam pilot. Killed by Quatre, of all people. What had been happening to them all in space? And, if Trowa was dead, Duo could be dead too. Her eyes stung and she wanted to scream that it wasn't fair, it couldn't be. But she pulled herself together. No matter what had happened, Quatre was her friend and he needed her now and his need brought her closer to being her self again. It was obvious that Trowa's death was affecting him terribly.

><br> Linnea patted the ground beside her and finally Quatre sat down, dashing the tears off his cheeks with the back of his hand. "It had to be an accident," she said softly, trying to reason with him. "I know you Quatre, you could never have done such a thing."

><br> "He's dead and I did it. How it happened doesn't matter," he said, still looking out over the lake.

><br> "Of course it matters. Tell me what happened. We are still friends. You're not angry at me for leaving the base? For breaking my promise?" her voice trembled a little and he looked at her.

><br> "Linnea," he said, forgetting Trowa for a moment and remembering that she had been in danger. "I'd never blame you for that. But you are alright aren't you? I haven't even asked if you're alright . . ."

><br> "I'm fine," she said quickly. "The only horrible thing was the coffee. Have you ever tasted military coffee Quatre?"

><br> It was obvious that she was hiding something, trying to be like Duo and hide her feelings behind a joke.

><br> She turned the subject back to him. "Whatever happened Quatre I'm sure Trowa didn't blame you either. Can't you tell me what happened?" She took his hand in her own and squeezed it. She looked into his eyes. "Quatre I believe in you, whatever happened. Just tell me, maybe it will help to talk about it."

><br> He sighed. Maybe it would help. He hadn't been able to talk about it with Heero. Heero did not invite confidences and seemed to be dealing with Trowa's death in the way he dealt with everything, silently and seemingly without emotion.

><br> She listened as he told her about his father's death, about building the Wing Zero, the mobile suit they had discovered that day at the desert base. The suit that had impressed them both so much.

><br> Linnea kept his hand in hers the whole time. She was struck by the devastating effect of the Zero System. She had had no idea it would have such an effect on a pilot. There was something so sinister about it.

><br> Quatre could see in her eyes that she didn't blame him for what had happened. That she still saw him as she had always seen him and her forgiveness for what he had done took away a little of his grief.

><br> "He could still be alive you know," she said thoughtfully.

"Someone may have found him. Space is not as solitary as we think. We have to hope that's true."

><br> If only it could be, Quatre thought.

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> A Gundam. A Gundam had appeared in a battle on Earth, near a place called the Cinq Kingdom.<br>

> To Duo, this meant everything. It was the Wing, he recognized it easily from the fuzzy news footage. Heero was protecting the Cinq Kingdom. Heero had an uncanny knowledge of their mission. He would know what was going on. He might even know where Trowa was. They had been together the last time Duo had seen them. If Trowa knew what was good for him he had already gone back to Earth and sprung Linnea from the trap he had put her in. But if he hadn't . . . He would just have to force Heero to tell him what he knew and help him find her. So much time had passed already and so much had happened. But he had to find her, he had promised himself.<br>

> "Do you really have to leave," Hilde asked wistfully, gazing at him with unmistakable emotion in her expressive blue eyes. "I made a promise," Duo said, almost more to himself, than to her. He felt uncomfortable with those eyes upon him, maybe he had led her on, made her believe he cared about her as more than a friend. The troubling part was that maybe he did. Damn, this was complicated. He had already been away from Linnea too long, when she needed him and he loved her. He was certain of that, and she loved him. The only certain thing in the world was their love.<br>

> But Hilde . . .he couldn't help caring what happened to her. Because of him and what he had said she had given her loyalties to his cause, turned her back on her career. Those beautiful blue eyes were shining suspiciously now. They were beautiful, Hilde was beautiful. He pulled her body close to his in a farewell hug and when she looked up into his face their lips were inches apart. He held his breath, shut his eyes and bent to touch his lips to hers. <br>

> But in his mind he saw another face instead, another pair of eyes, violet not blue, shining suspiciously when he kissed her goodbye. "Have faith in me Linnea," he heard his own voice saying. "I'll find you." She had swallowed her tears and nodded. To Hilde's disappointment, Duo's mouth brushed against her cheek instead of her lips and then he was gone. <br>

> "But I love you," she whispered, the suspicious gleam in her eyes becoming tears that slipped down her face. "I love you and I'll be here if you change your mind."<br>

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> Relena looked at Heero standing on the terrace, his arms folded, his posture as always, that of a soldier, straight and unbendable. It was a on a night like this when they had danced at St. Gabriel School. The most wonderful night of her life, to be in his arms, floating along on a beautiful sea of music. The two of them the only two people in the world. And he had saved her life that night, although earlier he had threatened to destroy her. Saved her then with the Wing, as he had saved her today. Whenever she needed him he was there. Her only love. Heero. <br>

> She wished she could dance with him again and as if heaven heard her wish, softly and hesitantly a tune wafted out of the upper window out into the night. It was a sad song, but it was music. Relena touched Heero on the shoulder. "May I have this dance," she asked, making a curtsy to him. He took her in his arms to dance with her, although his eyes could not meet hers. He looked out into the stars, into space as they twirled slowly on the stone terrace in the moonlight.<br>

> After awhile the music stopped mid-note, emphasized by a harsh slamming sound. But the interruption did not break into Relena and Heero's magic moment. He allowed her to rest her head on his shoulder silently and his arms went around her to hold her closer

automatically. Strangely enough, he thought then of Duo Maxwell, of all people. He thought that if he was Duo he would know what to do, what to say to Relena so she would know how he felt about her. Duo's emotions had never been tampered with. Duo's emotions had never been locked in a sealed room far from the light . . .<br>

> . . . Linnea slammed the cover down over the piano keys so hard that Quatre, standing in the doorway jumped. Dying. Soldiers were dying, she thought, dying for Treize and she sat here playing the piano. Dying for Treize. Treize was fighting OZ. If they had had Epyon everything would go their way and still she sat there, doing nothing, in the Cinq Kingdom, waiting for someone who would probably never come. Duo.<br>

> "What's wrong? I wish you hadn't stopped playing," Quatre said sitting on the bench beside her and searching her face for something. He had talked with Miss Noin earlier. She had said something disturbing about Linnea. Said that although on the outside she seemed to be fine that inside she was just a step away from breaking down. He saw now that what Miss Noin had said was true. She seemed to be struggling to find herself, to be herself again and right now it seemed like she was losing the battle.<br>

> What's wrong, Linnea repeated Quatre's question to herself. I want to leave here, I want to build Epyon. I can't stand it here another minute while soldiers are dying for Treize. That's all. But she said something else instead.<br>

> "Duo's never coming back, is he?" she said.<br>

> "Don't be silly Linnea. Duo loves you, I know that he does. Of course he does, and I know he must be trying to find you right now. It was just luck that Heero and I got here first," Quatre said, trying to comfort her. <br>

> "Do you really think that's true? If I could only believe that. If I could only have faith. But it's hard, it's too hard . . ." her voice trailed off and her eyes looked at something far away. <br>

> "Of course it's true," Quatre said, touching her cheek gently. "How could he help coming back? There's no one else like you Linnea. You're smart, pretty, sweet . . ."<br>

> She blushed. "Quatre, stop it. I am not . . ." Linnea protested.<br>

> How had this happened to her, he wondered. She had been so strong before but now she seemed like one of the delicate china cups they used to drink coffee out of. Any little thing might make her shatter. <br>

> "It's going to be alright. I promise," he said, carefully taking her in his arms to hold her and surprised when she wrapped hers around him tightly in a desperate embrace.<br>

> It had been months since anyone had touched her, other than Treize and she didn't want to think about that now. Just the brief flash of his name in her mind and she felt his arms around her, the buttons of his coat pressing into her, the scent of roses . . . and dammit, she had to stop this. Thank God for Quatre, he had just kept her from making an awful mistake. He had saved her again as he had saved her from OZ so many months ago.<br>Whenever she needed him, he was there. Her best friend. Quatre.<br>

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> <br> Epyon was starting to take shape out of the remnants of Linnea's original design. The remnants that hadn't been destroyed by the devastating bug she had planted in the program. Every time they opened it they lost more. What Treize's technicians had built could not even approximate what he had seen her create on the screen. But try as he might, Treize's backup engineer, Officer Vier could not recreate Linnea's work.



><br> "I'm sorry General. This Gundam is still a good mobile suit. But I can't hope to recreate these designs, it's beyond me," Vier apologized.

><br> Treize did not want a sad copy of Linnea's creation. He wanted the Epyon she had designed, designed with him as her inspiration. This second best attempt by Vier was not good enough. The more time that passed the less confident he was that she would come to Luxembourg. He had thought the lure of the Epyon would win her over eventually, she had seemed obsessed with the project.

><br> And then there had been that surprising chemistry between them, he had felt an almost electric charge run through her when he kissed her . . . He knew where she was, thanks to a timely letter from his cousin, Dorothy Catalonia. Perhaps he should write to Linnea, remind her of the Epyon project, remind her of their friendship . . .

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><br> Nights were the worst. She couldn't sleep with her mind racing with conflicting feelings. One minute she was sure she should stay here in the Cinq Kingdom, the next minute she felt horrible that she was not in Luxembourg aiding the Treize faction. She got out of bed and went down to her special place in the garden.

><br> Dorothy was also awake, she was still in a fever over the battle she had seen the day before with Miss Relena. It had been so exciting. She heard someone walking in the hall and peeked out her door. What could Linnea be up to so late at night, she wondered. She decided to follow her . . .

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> Duo couldn't believe his eyes. He had hoped to find Heero here, hoped he would help him find Linnea. But there she was, right in front of him. And she was just fine, nothing had happened to her. If it was possible she was even more beautiful than when he'd last seen her.<br>

> Linnea was lying on the wicker cushioned couch in the garden of the Cinq Kingdom, her favorite place, especially late at night when she couldn't sleep. She let a hand drift down to touch the dewy grass. He just watched her for a long time. How had he stayed away for so long? His throat ached from wanting her, missing her. She continued looking up at the clear sky, studying the moon and stars. Was she thinking about him? Missing him? He thought he had never seen anything so beautiful in his life, she looked like something out of a fairy tale lying there in her nightgown in the moonlight with the palace of the Cinq Kingdom in the background. She hugged her arms around herself and caressed her arms longingly, closing her eyes. "Duo," she whispered to the stars. "Find me." <br>

> He couldn't stand it anymore, just watching her wasn't enough. He popped out from behind the tree and knelt in the grass beside the couch and put his arms around her. Unbelievably the fairy-tale, dreamlike quality that surrounded the moment remained intact. She reached a hand up and touched his cheek, not even questioning how he had suddenly appeared. She knew why he was here, because she wanted him so much, because she had wished so hard.<br>

> "Not here, someone will see. Come inside," she protested while returning his enthusiastic kisses. "Don't worry, all the good little girls are sound asleep by now," he answered, holding her tightly. "And I can't wait another minute, not another second to be with you." How could she resist?<br>

> Dorothy could hardly contain herself from laughing. Yes, all the good little girls like Miss Relena were asleep, weren't they? So what did that make her and Linnea. . .<br>

> He kissed away her protests until she was as willing as he was to make love in the garden.<br>

> "Oh baby," he said, looking down on her. "Whenever we're together it's like the combination of mobile suit fuel and a match.

KABOOM!!"<br>

> She looked back up at him, into the eyes she loved. He was perfectly serious, not joking at all. "Duo," she said. "That's the most romantic thing you've ever said to me . . ."<br>

> He touched her lips gently with his fingertips. Her lips were so warm from contact with his but the rest of her was cool from the night air. He trailed his hand over the soft cotton nightgown until he reached the hem and slid his hand up her leg to the curve of her waist, it was all so familiar, every part of her body as well-known to him as the cockpit of the DeathScythe. He twined his fingers with hers and pressed her back against the cushions as he held her hands and let his mouth travel over the paths he knew she liked best, discovering new ones. He whispered her name as her lips caressed his neck and she moved her body beneath his. He felt the delicious little tremors run through her as he touched her and the sensation of her breath in his ear and her silky hair against his cheek evoked the same feelings in him.<br>

> Linnea tightened her arms around him and sighed in relief. She wanted to prolong this moment when they were one person, she wanted to stay physically connected to him like this forever, with the weight of his body on top of hers, his hands tightly entwined with hers, his lips on hers. She wanted to keep it this way, not knowing where she ended and he began. Knowing that when they were like this she didn't need to have any doubts. Now that he was here she was herself again. She knew where her loyalties were and what she had to do. Her mind was clear again, as clear as the sky above them. <br>

><br>TO BE CONTINUED . . .

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## 9. Returning Favors, Conclusion

Author's Note: This is the end folks. If I did this right you might need a tissue (or two) for this chapter!! Thanks to all who reviewed and read this story! Sit back, relax and read on as she of the forked eyebrows whips up some trouble . . .

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><br>RETURNING FAVORS

>By YamchaOtaku<br>

><br>CHAPTER 11

>( CONCLUSION )<br>

><br> Linnea sat on the stone wall overlooking the lake. Finally there was peace in her heart. Duo was back, they were together, she had nothing to worry about, no doubts about her decision to come to the Cinq Kingdom. It had obviously been the right choice after all.

She smiled at the thought of him. He was enjoying himself tormenting Heero about Relena. The look on Heero's face, or rather the total lack of expression, was priceless. But she had decided to come down here and be alone awhile. She didn't want to become one of those clingy girls that never left her boyfriend's side. It was hard not to be that way.

>She had missed him so much that it would be easy to grab onto his arm and never let go. But sitting here alone was nice too, the sun was just turning the water amazing shades of red and pink and orange.<br>

> She didn't remind herself who had taught her to take the time to enjoy the beauty of Earth.<br>

> A voice interrupted her quiet thoughts. "Do you mind if I join you Linnea? We so rarely get a chance to talk, just the two of us," Dorothy said in her deceptively sweet voice. There's a good reason for that, Linnea thought. Dorothy's very presence in the Cinq Kingdom was proof that Relena's absolute pacifism was unrealistic, she should have kicked her out long ago. The girl had nearly gotten Relena killed when Noin, Heero and Quatre had fought the Romefeller Foundation. But no, she was still here. Linnea sighed and then went back to looking out over the quiet lake that was the centerpiece of the Cinq Kingdom.<br>

> "It's too bad that as a political refugee -- as you call yourself -- you don't find it necessary to attend Miss Relena's little classes at the institute very often. Although that's probably a good thing. I'm sure your arguments for the continuation of war would be much more intelligent and well-spoken than mine and then how would Miss Relena look in front of her admiring students," Dorothy said.<br>

> "I'm not pro-war. I just believe that history shows we must have deterrents to protect peace," Linnea protested, wishing that Dorothy would go away and wondering what she was trying to get at.<br>

> "Is that how you justify yourself," Dorothy said. "I've often wondered. You see I think that you really love war as much as I do Linnea and I admire that in a person. Look at where your talents lie, they lie in creating the weapons of war. What would you do if there were no more wars, as Miss Relena would have it in her ideal world? Why there would be no need for you in that kind of world Linnea, you must know that. You're so important now. Sought after by OZ, sought after by my cousin Treize, sought after by the colonial rebellion. And you'd do anything to keep things that way I'd be willing to say. You'd even send your lover out to die in that Gundam you designed."<br>

> Linnea gave her a shocked look but Dorothy just smiled and went on. "Oh yes, I've seen the two of you. You see lots of interesting things when you take late night walks around the grounds. I have to agree with you that war adds a certain zest to love affairs. It's so exciting when every time might be the last. Well there's no reason you should worry too much about losing Duo when you have the equivalent of a replaceable part in Quatre. Don't look so surprised! Didn't you know he's in love with you too? I do envy you Linnea, although I wouldn't care to adopt that adorable, sloppy tomboy image you put on."<br>

> "How dare you say those things. You-you bitch," Linnea said in a strangled voice and reached out slap Dorothy's smug, smiling face. "Tsk, tsk" Dorothy said, grabbing her wrist and stopping the blow. "We must practice pacifism, you and I, at least while we're living in the Cinq Kingdom."<br>

> Dorothy got up and walked away leaving Linnea looking pale and feeling emotionally drained. She wanted to put Duo in danger? Quatre loved her? Her head was swimming. What was it that was really

important to her? She saw herself working on Epyon, playing her little back and forth games with Treize. Unable to decide where her loyalties should be. Was Dorothy right? She felt like she was going to be sick. Her stomach clenched and her head started to throb sickeningly. All the things Dorothy had said pounded like a hammer in her mind. That wasn't her, it couldn't be her. <br>

> But yet, she had created Epyon, she hadn't been able to stop. Was her ambition not freedom for the colonies at all, but to become the creator of the most incredible weapon of war ever made? You had to do it, she told herself. But you enjoyed it, admit it, part of you loved it. You couldn't stop, you wanted to impress Treize. "What's wrong with me, what's wrong with me," she whispered out loud over and over as tears she couldn't stop started to slide down her cheeks.<br>

> Dorothy smiled to herself as she walked up the path. That would certainly give Linnea something to think about wouldn't it? Ahhh the joys of manipulation, she could swear she had seen the doubts popping up in the other girl's mind as she spoke. Poor Linnea, she didn't want to face the real her inside. But, if she came out, what spice that would add to the already tense situation. What a fool she was to have such power and not take advantage of it. All Dorothy had to do was close all the doors but one and Linnea would be forced to make a move. She was so wrapped up in her own pleasant thoughts that she nearly bumped into Quatre. She smiled at him sweetly. Sometimes things worked out so perfectly it was frightening.<br>

> "Hello Dorothy," he said politely. "Hello Quatre," she answered. "Are you going down to the lake? It's lovely down there right now and the sun is just about to set. Unfortunately I have other things to do. But I was just chatting with Linnea and I'm sure she's still down there. Alone." <br>

> She savored the look on his face when she mentioned Linnea. Oh yes, he had it bad but of course he was too self-sacrificing to try and come between his friends' relationship. All the players in this game were so fascinating. Dorothy sighed in contentment. Her little stay in the Cinq Kingdom was turning out to be so much more fun than she had hoped.<br>

> Quatre paused a moment and looked at Linnea silhouetted against the sunset-colored lake. He loved her with all his heart. In his eyes she was the most beautiful, perfect girl on Earth or in space. When did he fall in love with her? He knew it as soon as he saw her lying there on the ground unconscious, when he saw her face in the glow of flaming mobile suit she had destroyed. He had known then that she was an angel, the only girl he could ever love. He loved her so much that when he met Duo he had brought him to the desert just so she would be happy.<br>

> These last few days when she'd been so miserable, so on the edge, it was difficult not to tell her how he felt. To tell her that if Duo never came he'd be there for her -- always. So difficult not to kiss her when he'd held her on the piano bench. But she was in love with Duo and he was certain that Duo loved her just as much as he did. If she was happy that was enough for him, besides they could still be friends and he could still be there for her when she needed him as she had been there for him. <br>

> Linnea heard the crackle of footsteps and blinked her eyes furiously, she couldn't see anyone right now. She had to be alone and if Dorothy had come back to torment her further she would drown her in that lake. Yes, she would.<br>

> "Whoever you are just go away and leave me alone. Get the hell out of here," she said in a strangled, teary voice.<br>

> Linnea? Crying? Quatre had never seen her cry, he'd seen her with tears in her eyes of course, but never actually crying like this. He

stared at her tear-stained face for a moment unable to believe his eyes. He sat down beside her and tried to wipe the tears off her face with his hand but she pushed it away impatiently. "Linnea? What's wrong? Are you all right? Tell me, I'll help you. Please talk to me, tell me you're all right. Linnea?" he said, shaking her a little to get her attention. <br>

> She turned her face up to look at him and she saw that Dorothy was right about at least one thing. He did love her. Guilt coursed through her as she remembered every sign she had ignored along the way. How he had held her and comforted her when she thought Duo was never coming back. The things he had said then and what the words had really meant. That he had been speaking for himself, speaking from his own heart. No, no, no. She cared about Quatre, more than she cared about nearly anyone. But not like that. Why did he have to fall in love with her? Why couldn't he just be her friend? And if this was true, was everything else she had said true too? Fresh tears poured down her cheeks. Once she had started she couldn't stop crying. Damn Dorothy for making her see this. <br>

> "I said leave me alone. Just leave me alone," she said, getting up and running away from him up to the path. <br>

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> Duo knew she was in there, he could hear her crying, but only God knew what she was so upset about. And what God knew Shinigami was determined to find out. The door was locked but that was a small matter to him.<br>

> Now that he was in he wasn't sure what to do so he just sat on the bed beside her a little while. She had to stop crying sometime, didn't she? How could one girl hold so many tears? When he put his hand on the pillow it was soaked with them. <br>

> "Linnea," he said softly. "What's the matter? You can tell me. It can't be that bad." She didn't answer.<br>

> The nice guy approach wasn't cracking it. <br>

> "I mean it," he said in a louder, less gentle voice. "You have to tell me right now!"<br>

> "D-Dorothy," she choked out. "What she said . . ." Then she started to cry even harder, if that was possible, and Duo felt like he knew what Noah was up against when he built that ark. What was it about girls? Linnea had faced so much and he had only seen her shed one tear through it all, that night when he first left so many months ago. He had asked her not to cry then and she had taken him at his word. But now, just because of something some girl said she was in a hysterical outburst. He didn't understand, but he loved her, so he tried.<br>

> "Dorothy?" he said. "The one with the eyebrows? The one who tried to shish-ke-bob Heero? I know she's scary, baby, but you don't need to cry."<br>

> "She made me see myself," Linnea sobbed, not even hearing his attempt at a joke. Dorothy was no laughing matter. "I'm horrible. I've done horrible things."<br>

> "We've all done horrible things," Duo said sensibly. "It's a war Linnea. We do things we don't want to do and that's the problem."<br>

> "It's not that, if it were only that," Linnea protested. "She said I design Gundams because I love war. Without the Gundams I wouldn't be anybody. I wouldn't have a purpose in life. She said I wanted to sacrifice you to my ambition . . . and she saw us in the garden. She watched us, she saw everything . . ."<br>

> Her voice trailed off.<br>

> "Listen," Duo said, understanding her at last, but wondering why Dorothy had gotten her all worked up like this. There could be no

good reason for upsetting another person like that. "You are not responsible for me and I'm not going to get killed. I have DeathScythe. You created it so it couldn't be defeated. It's the best of both of us combined. Right? Baby you help me, you don't hurt me and I fight because I want to. I have to."<br>

> "And Linnea when the battles are over, and they will end if I have anything to say about it, you'll have a purpose. Don't you know that? I'll need someone to keep me out of trouble. That person has to be you. You and I were meant to be together, this is just fate's crazy way of making that happen. How else could we have met, me a guy out in space doing salvage work and you a typical high school girl? Don't cry anymore. Dorothy was so wrong. I don't know why she said those things. She doesn't know you, she doesn't know a goddamned thing about the girl I love. And I'll always love you, no matter what happens. I'll never hurt you Linnea. You are everything to me." <br>

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> "What a night," Duo thought to himself. Neither one of them had slept a wink and he felt irritable enough to kill the next person he spoke to. "I never want to go through something like that again." His thoughts were interrupted by a soft tap on the door. It was Dorothy Catalonia. He couldn't believe the girl had the nerve to come and see Linnea so soon. "She's not here now and I'm sure she doesn't want to see you," he said closing the door in her face. Dorothy grabbed hold of the door with one of her slender, but surprisingly strong, hands. "I know. That's why I need to ask you to do me a favor Duo," she said in a silky sweet voice that attempted to sound repentant. "What is wrong with you," he asked in disgust. "What did Linnea ever do to you? Why do you hate her?" <br>

> "Me? Hate Linnea? You are so mistaken. I admire her. You could even say I'm jealous, that I envy her," Dorothy answered, letting her eyes travel over Duo suggestively. He stepped back a little from her, as if! He remembered Linnea's words that Dorothy had seen them in the garden. Had seen everything. What a thought. "Don't worry, you're not my type," she said, laughing softly at the shocked look on his face. <br>

> "Did you ever think that Linnea is wasting herself here? I think she could be a powerful force with her talents. Yet she just hangs around here, amusing herself with you." She could see he was starting to get angry so she decided not to push it anymore.<br>

> "Just give this letter to Linnea. Even though she's upset with me right now that doesn't mean she shouldn't receive her mail does it?" Duo took the envelope. "Dorothy," he said, "this is already open." "Oh that," she said, shrugging. "It came in a package delivered to me and I opened it without looking. I must say it is a very touching letter. My cousin has quite a way with words." <br>

> "Your cousin?" Duo said in a puzzled voice. <br>

> "Of course," Dorothy answered, walking away. "Treize Khushrenada."<br>

> The thin envelope crinkled a little in his hand as his grip tightened. Why the hell would Treize Khushrenada be writing a letter to Linnea? Curiosity was ripping him up inside. And the letter was already open, even Dorothy had read it. It occurred to him that she deliberately meant for him to read it too, but he couldn't stop himself. <br>

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><br> My Dear Linnea,

> I know you must be waiting for my reaction to your little surprise. You were impressive as usual, beyond my expectations. I should be upset but instead this only increases my deep admiration for you and

makes me even more determined to have you here with me at this time. Just consider what an unstoppable combination we would make, you and I, Linnea. With your incredible brilliance on my side the Treize Faction would be able to crush OZ and end the threat of the mobile dolls.<br> On a more personal level, I only kissed you that day as an excuse to give you the key. But now, even with the weight of these war concerns on my mind, I am distracted. Distracted by the memory of how right you felt in my arms, the moment I felt you react to me and the memory of the touch of your lips, like rose petals on mine. Come to Luxembourg, Linnea. Build Epyon and we will defeat OZ. Treize

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><br> Duo crushed the paper in his hand. Phrases from the letter pounded in his head. "Felt you react to me," he thought, remembering times he had surprised her with a sudden kiss, the change in her as she would seem to melt into him and return it. He loved that about her. Lips like rose petals, he would never say something like that himself, but now that he thought of it, it was a damned accurate description. Too accurate. Treize knew. Treize knew exactly what it was like to kiss Linnea.

><br> With perfect bad timing, Linnea stepped into his room, still pale and red-eyed from crying so much the night before. Now what, she thought despondently, noticing immediately that Duo seemed to be about ready to explode. She knew she couldn't take any more right now or she would have a nervous breakdown. Suddenly Duo tossed a crumpled piece of paper in her face and started shouting at her. She looked at him, dazed, what was he talking about and more importantly how could he or anybody for that matter know these things?

><br> The words "goddamned letter" broke through her shock and she reached down and picked up the paper and read it. She sat down on the edge of the bed and covered her face with her hand, if she had any tears left she would have cried. What could have inspired Treize to write such a letter, she knew he didn't have any real feelings for her. Did he? He couldn't. This was just his latest move in their ongoing game, but how to explain that to Duo.

><br> And that was exactly what he expected, an explanation.

><br> "Explain this away, Linnea," he said. "Go ahead, explain to me about your little surprise. Tell me about Epyon and don't forget to tell me what it felt like to kiss Treize."

><br> She dared to look at him and found herself looking not at Duo, but at the God of Death. Blazing blue eyes that had only looked at her before with love were filled with rage. How could she even talk to this Duo, let alone explain the complicated situation between her and Treize?

><br> "I was there at OZ headquarters to distract them," she started, trying to find the right words. "Trowa said to give them something, to occupy their attention, while the other engineers finished the upgrades to the existing mobile suits. They created Mercurius and Vayeate in space and I created Epyon on Earth. Once I started I couldn't help completing it, I wasn't supposed to, but it was so fantastic. The greatest Gundam ever created, I couldn't stop working on it. I realized of course that Treize would steal the design but I put in a safeguard to stop anyone from building it but me. He did everything to gain my trust, he even gave me a gun to make me feel safe. Then when the Romefeller Foundation approved production of the mobile dolls, he resigned, he wanted me to escape and come to Luxembourg and work with him. I said no, but he gave me the key anyway. Somehow it turned into a game between us . . . I escaped but I didn't go to Luxembourg. I came here, to wait for you."

><br> "A game," Duo said in astonishment. "A game? You designed a

weapon of mass destruction as part of a little game between you and the Commander-in-Chief of OZ? You're not telling me everything. Even before, when we were in the desert with Quatre that guy fascinated you. Part of you wants to go to Luxembourg and build that Gundam, I can see it in your face. Damn, Linnea."

><br> "Maybe you're right," she said defensively. "OZ has to be stopped and at least the Treize Faction is fighting them. I'm not sure, I'm not sure any more who is the enemy. I want to be doing something and maybe Epyon is the answer. I've been sitting here in Relena's dream world of peace while outside people are still fighting and dying. Sitting here waiting for you Duo, because I love you, I chose to stay here instead of doing something."

><br> "Oh, so you kissed Treize because you love me. I get it now," Duo said sarcastically. She was too much, practically admitting that she really wanted to be in Luxembourg building a Gundam for Treize Khushrenada.

><br> "Why are you deliberately misunderstanding me," she said. "Can't you read? He kissed me, he was giving me a key. Was I supposed to wait for you to come rescue me instead? Heero and Quatre were here weeks ahead of you. Where were you Duo? What were you doing all that time?"

><br> "Protecting the colonies. That's my mission," he said stiffly. "Well that's what I was doing too," she answered. "My mission was to design a decoy to distract OZ in order to buy the others time to upgrade the Gundams. I did that. I may have gone a little too far but no one can build that mobile suit without my cooperation. Treize did kiss me, but what was I supposed to do? I suppose you would rather I'd thrown the key back in his face?"

><br> "Just tell me you didn't like it," Duo said softly. "You can't, can you? Can you Linnea?"

><br> He was unbelievable, she thought. Why was he being so difficult and accusatory when she hadn't done anything wrong, she thought to herself. And, come to think of it, why had he read a letter addressed to her?

><br> She lashed out at him angrily. "As someone once told me, I may be taken but I'm not blind," she said significantly.

><br> Heavy silence filled the room and they looked at each other aghast at what she had just said. She was immediately sorry but she couldn't take the words back now.

><br> "That was a joke and you knew it. Don't you dare throw that in my face," Duo finally answered, thinking briefly that he hadn't kissed Hilde goodbye though part of him had wanted to. But that was different. Hilde wasn't the enemy, and Treize was. He was the cause of all their problems, one of the main reasons that battles were continuing. What was wrong with Linnea that she couldn't see that? Why couldn't she see?

><br> Linnea realized that she might have gone too far. "Duo, please," she said, attempting to defuse the situation, which was rapidly getting out of control. "I'm sorry. It was nothing but one kiss. You're the one I want, the one I'm in love with. Don't you know that by now? I'm here aren't I? If I had wanted to be working with the Treize Faction I would be. Can't you see that? I had the choice and I came here."

><br> "Spare me, Linnea," Duo said. He was angry. He was hurt. He was tired. And he didn't want to hear her explanations any more, not now. He knelt beside the bed and grabbed her face in his hands and looked directly into her eyes. "Look at me. You don't have to stay here because of me. Go ahead, go to Luxembourg if that's what you want and knock yourself out. Build the best Gundam in the world and if it ever comes against me I'll destroy it. Dorothy was right about you after



all, I was wrong. Every word she said about you was true."

><br> He walked away and slammed the door behind him.

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> Duo hesitated outside the door. He was so upset with her, but the look on her face . . . maybe he shouldn't have said that about Dorothy. Some of what she had been saying started to sink in. It had only been a kiss after all, one she hadn't initiated and of course he wanted her to escape from OZ and what did the means of escape matter if she were only safe? He just couldn't go back in there yet, he needed to be alone now. But he'd talk to her later and they would work it out. He just needed time to recover from that image. Of course she loved him and he loved her, but right now he just needed to get away before he said something else he'd regret later. <br>

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> Linnea curled up on Duo's bed and wrapped her arms around the pillow. She closed her eyes and saw him looking at her, his eyes blazing with hate. He hated her. He really must hate her to say those things. How could it be when just last night they had planned to be together always and he had promised to never, never hurt her and to always love her no matter what? No matter what. That was funny, it hadn't taken much at all to make him forget that promise. <br>

> "Oh Duo," she sobbed, burying her face in the pillow. Finally she got up and splashed cold water on her face. She couldn't stay in the Cinq Kingdom a minute longer, she knew that. She couldn't bear to see hate in Duo's face, she'd rather not see him again at all. And Quatre, if he really knew her, he would hate her too. She almost hated herself. She slammed a hairbrush into the mirror over the sink, shattering her own reflection inside. There was only one place to go, one choice left, one person who had never judged her. Treize. <br>

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> Duo stepped back into the darkened room. He felt rational again and rather remorseful, he had gone a bit too far with the Dorothy remark. He couldn't have said anything worse if he had planned it ahead. They had never fought before, he should have known when it finally happened it would be a doozy. But once they got past this, things would be better than ever between them and he was already looking forward to the making up part. He'd just have to make sure that from now on all her kisses were for him. He flipped on the light and to his surprise the room was empty. Maybe he had been stupid to think she would still be waiting there in his room after what he said. She probably went for a walk or went running to Quatre for sympathy. The hurt, stricken look on her face when he had left appeared in his mind as he walked out of the room again and the first tiny flicker of doubt hit him. She was still here somewhere, she had to be. She knew he was just angry, and, he admitted, jealous too. She knew he loved her and hadn't meant a word he'd said. <br>

> He avoided the thought that he had dared her to leave.<br>

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> Linnea pressed her forehead against the cool Gundanium alloy that formed the armor of DeathScythe Hell. "No matter what else I do, I gave you the best I had in me DeathScythe. I know without a doubt that that much is true," she murmured. "Whatever happens, keep him safe, make him the strongest fighter. It's all I've ever really wanted." <br>

> She laid her hand on the mobile suit as if willing all the love she had for Duo Maxwell into it, the love she thought he didn't want

anymore. And then, she turned her back on the Cinq Kingdom.<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br>

> He realized too late that it had all been a setup. And hadn't he played his part perfectly? How had he let Dorothy and Treize manipulate him like that? It was as if they had written the perfect script to tear them apart and he had recited every line just so . . . She was gone and he was the one who had pushed her away. It was all over, but DeathScythe remained and he could still feel her presence when he looked at the mobile suit. He pressed his forehead against the cool Gundanium alloy and somehow he felt that she still loved him deep inside. But how could she, after what he had said. He had forgiven her as soon as he walked out that door. Why hadn't he gone back to tell her? It was all over, but he couldn't believe it.<br>

>THE END<br>

>Author's Note: Shocking huh!! Good old Dorothy, what would we do without her? Duo is so cranky when he doesn't get his beauty sleep --- temper, temper!! Quatre in love with Linnea, did you see that coming??? Please review, it's easy, just type in that little white box down there!! Did you cry? I did ;i-\_-;i<br>

> <p><p>

End  
file.